

PROLOGUE

"While riding on a train going West
I fell asleep for to take my rest
I dreamed a dream that made me sad
concerning myself and the first few friends I had."*

It was my last day at work in the commissary. The last time I was going to pack groceries in brown paper bags for the American military, and the last time I was to pedal furiously by bike among the snow-laden streets in time to get to my second job. It was October 1990 I was in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, high in the Bavarian alps working for the American forces. This was my fourth period of work in that idyllic German ski-resort going back 16 years. I had lost count of the number of different jobs I had had since 1975, the first time I had decided to travel. It was definitely over thirty, but this was the first time that I had two legal jobs at the same time and was not liable for tax on any!

My day job was at the Commissary, where the American forces and their dependants purchased their groceries, which were flown over from America and cost much less than similar foodstuff on the German economy. My official title was 'bagger', for this I received no wage, I and my colleague Vince, worked for tips only. This could at times be suprisingly lucrative considering there was no tax to pay. It was also a good laugh, especially with Vince, my Scots colleague, whose off-the-wall sense of humour helped to ameliorate the mundane work.

'Bagging', entailed merely putting all the customer's provisions into sturdy brown bags, then into trolleys for the customer to wheel away, and one would think that such a mundane task would not involve much creativity, but we strived to squeeze as much as we could out of it: When trying to outdo each other in order to obtain a neat and square a bag as possible. For example: The ideal package was two large packets of cereal, which fitted exactly in the paper bags, but they were few and far between, and imaginary Pythonesque debates on how best to pack a bag, and our most difficult challenges to obtain 'squareosity' ensued:

Vince: "I once packed a grecian urn, two candelabras and a chandelier and still got it square."

Me: "That's nothing! I once packed a large star of David; two live octopus; a three pronged cobbler's last, and still got it square."

Vince: "I once packed a windmill, a live lobster....."

All this lunatic banter was accompanied with guffaws of laughter as the objects got even sillier. The two checkout personnel thought us completely mad.

My second job was, as Monty Python would put it, something completely different. It was in the gymnasium, or Fitness Centre as it was now known. I was self employed as masseur for American Forces. I had qualified as Masseur two years earlier, and had my own portable couch delivered from

England and set up in the corner of an upstairs room. I had little custom, but allied to my bagging, I earned sufficient to pay my way. I charged the equivalent of £9 an hour, twenty per cent of which, went to the Armed forces. I had also a room in the civilian housing quarters, for which I paid DM80 (£28) a month inclusive of heating and light. But with the gradual removal of American forces from Germany, the chances of making a decent living receded, and along with many others who had lived in this idyllic town, I was making plans for the future.

On that final day and after administering my final massage, I gazed from the balcony onto the Kramer mountain. I had playing on my tape deck the strains of a track from 'Enya', and knowing that this would probably be the last time I would work in Garmisch, a place that had come to mean so much to me, I began to feel a deep sadness. I looked up again at the peak of the mountain, realising that I may never see it again. I was finishing work in the place I had first started, in the Gymnasium 15 years ago. I thought of all the friends I had made over the years, and of the humorous times I was lucky enough to have been witness to in this most beautiful of towns. As I ruminated on these, my mind drifted back to those first tentative steps to a new life, back in 1975.

Footnote:

GARMISCH: The district is located in the Bavarian Alps and includes the highest mountain of Germany, the Zugspitze (2962 m). The highest peaks are grouped along the Austrian border, where the mountain ridges of the **Wettersteingebirge** and the **Karwendelgebirge** rise. Between them the Isar river runs northwards. North of these ridges there is a valley housing the tourist resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The valley together with the surrounding mountains is called the **Werdenfelser Land**. Further north the ridges of the **Ammergebirge** and the **Estergebirge** rise, which are still over 2000 m high. In the northernmost parts of the district there is alpine uplands (about 600 m high). Here the Staffelsee is located, a lake of 8 km².

CHAPTER ONE

It was September 1975. I stood for a while at the rail of the boat watching the wind whipping up little soufflés of foam on the tops of the waves, until the cool September air, the fading of the light, and a sense of increasing loneliness all conspired to make me seek the company of fellow passengers. Weaving my way across the wind-blown deck, I headed for the nearest entrance and down to my cabin.

I was leaving the port of Hull behind me with little notion of where I was going, although I had the idea at the back of my mind to reach Spain and the 'Nag's Head', a pub I had made my local on my two week package tour earlier that year, but I was open to suggestions, and if events caused me to go in another direction, so be it. I know that making a pub in Spain one's goal isn't exactly reaching for the stars, but what the hell! I was a simple guy. I had also noticed the laid-back atmosphere and the seemingly carefree life enjoyed by the workers there, when on holiday and on returning to my comparatively mundane factory work, my longing to return had increased, with the result that one month later I had quit my job to see what the wide world had to offer.

The space between the two sets of bunks allowed a space in which the average cat would have had a hard time being swung round in, while the general condition of the cabin indicated that no-one had cleaned it since the previous occupants' departure, a stain on the carpet still exuding a whiff of alcohol, telling of some drink unsteadily poured. I looked around then slumped on the bed, comprehending for the first time the enormity of the ties that I had broken and became suddenly depressed, due no doubt to the first pangs of loneliness and insecurity that attack many a virgin traveller. I had always been one for the 'craic', as the Irish say, but that involved company, and now for the first time in my life I was completely alone. Without friends, without the steady rock of a family and utterly bereft of any plan as to what I wanted to do or be. Then, looking down at the carpet stains, I thought of the two bars on board and was instantly galvanised into action.

I found the lounge after consulting a plan of the boat tacked onto a bulkhead. It bore the legend 'Amsterdam Lounge' above the entrance. It was a large room with a blue carpet and matching ceiling, supported at regular intervals by columns painted the same azure shade. This soothing sea and sky was at odds with the furniture: some dumpy, brown, wooden tables with red formica tops, bearing stained beer mats and a variety of plastic ash trays of various shapes and colours surrounded by red armchairs.

The boat had been at sea some half an hour by now and already I could see a throng of around twenty men, all jockeying for position as the barman prepared to open the metal grille, and all it seemed, attempting to attract the solitary barman's attention at the same

time. I positioned myself at the back and while waiting my turn, observed the means employed by the ones at the front to achieve their objective. It was one that I have seen repeated many times at crowded bars before and since: Those at the front would adopt a lean-over-the-counter stance, as if to project themselves into the barman's path, while at the same time waving their banknotes at him and fixing their eyes to his with an intensity that would be frightening were it not in the climate of a public bar. All of these actions would be performed with a half-open mouth, in order that a precious millisecond be saved when the order was finally blurted out, then, when finally the order had been taken, a visible relief could be then seen taking place in the man. Resuming his normal stance, the shoulders would gradually drop from around his neck, the eyes lose their fixed stare, and now relaxed, he dared to look smugly around him.

I obtained my pint and made for the nearest vacant table, easing myself down into the soft, red chair. Sipping at the indifferent beer I gazed around at this flotsam of humanity, when three men approached the table. The taller of the three said something to me that I took to be permission to seat themselves, I nodded and gave a mumbled assent. They were of varying height and appearance, the smaller and stockier of the three shared the carrying of a large hold-all with the one of medium height and held a strap each, which I thought a little strange, my mind wandering to IRA bombs; especially when they eased it under the table with what I thought uncommon tenderness.

The tall and skinny man took off his jacket and slung it behind his chair, the other two followed suit. Sitting down they stretched themselves out, each emitting a deep sigh, as if in this simple act they had achieved some personal nirvana. They then started to talk among themselves, and it was only by concentrating, while feigning indifference, that I realized they were speaking English. Then, as though at a given signal, each in turn gave a sharp glance in the direction of the bar. I then heard the taller one say in a whisper, 'reet Sam, get them oot'. The small and stocky Sam quickly dived under the table, unzipped the hold-all, and started to pull out pint bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale and three half-pint glasses, opening the bottles with an old fashioned opener before distributing them to his mates. "Ye havin one, Son?" The question was directed at me by Sam, as he was hunched crab-like, halfway underneath the table. "Er, Yes sure," I replied, glancing at the other two, who beamed at me as if I was doing them a great honour by my acceptance. "Finest ale in the country," pronounced the tall one. "I'm Ron by the way. "This", he said, pointing to his right, "is Jim, and the one who's dressed like a club comic is Sam:"

A club comic was a good description. He wore white loafers with purple socks; cream trousers; a brown belt, and a green shirt adorned with a red tie of the sort that used to be worn by flash American mobsters in 'B' movies, while his lurid, lime-green jacket was of the type sported by Teddy Boys in their heyday. The only part of him that wasn't

loud was his head; which was completely bald, save for a few wisps of greying, black hair that sprouted above his ears. Ron, in contrast, was dressed like a businessman in dark suit and white shirt; while Jim affected a sense of dress somewhere in between, casual in jeans, red jersey and blue blazer. They were all miners from the Durham area, and as I was from a mining village, had something in common, and thus spent the next hour swapping jokes and discussing various weighty matters like the price of ale and tobacco in England compared to Holland, and how much they could smuggle back.

Two hours later I was on my third bottle of Newcastle's finest and was really getting into the swing of things. All my previous anxiety and doubt had been washed away by the first two bottles, which tasted like nectar after the bland liquid served at the bar. Ron observed that they always brought their own into the bars on these little trips, and hadn't been caught yet. Sam had even brought a bottle of whisky, and after cheekily asking the barman for some small glasses, was chasing down the ale with slugs of the amber liquid. I had foolishly joined him and was quite enjoying the unfamiliar taste, which Sam appreciated by refilling my glass at the slightest opportunity. I made the observation that perhaps we ought to buy something from the bar occasionally, to which Sam replied that we would be "arlreet." I couldn't help however, pondering on the logic of that statement from a barman's point of view. Four people come into a bar, never buy a drink, and proceed to get rat-arsed!

I was soon in fine form, wallowing in the natural good humour of the lads, resulting in all my worries of a few hours ago receding further and further away with each glorious drink, and was soon bathed in a rosy glow and exuding bonhomie all round. This happy state failed to obscure the fact that Sam was getting increasingly querulous, throwing insulting remarks to occupants at the next table with gay abandon. This caused Ron and Jim a little concern and they hissed at him to shut up, which seemed to have at least a temporary effect. I ignored him and directed my comments and jokes at the other two.

Twenty minutes later, I thought it time to launch into a rousing folk song. There are in my experience three basic types of drunk: the maudlin ones who cry about some perceived sad happening in the past, and weep on hearing 'Danny Boy', the violent ones who think the whole world is against them and are looking for something or someone to cause them to fight, and the merry ones who tend to burst into song thinking that's what everybody wants to hear. I belong to the latter. I was about to suggest a song they might know, and was waiting to catch the eye of Ron and Jim, who were occupied eying up a blowsy blonde at the bar, when I felt a splash of warm liquid on an exposed part of my ankle. I looked up startled. Sam, now half-reclining in his chair was relieving himself under the table! I jumped up in surprise, shock and amazement, my sudden movement causing my chair to fly backwards as I stared at the urinating Sam. Ron and Jim turned round and sizing up the situation instantly - I had a intuitive feeling that they had

done this before - attempted to grab him, a bad move, as Sam fell off his seat and jarred the table with his outstretched leg, upsetting the 'Newky Browns' and glasses of whisky, while still miraculously retaining hold of his penis, and was now blithely spraying the carpet while laid on his side. Now a drunken man is not easily persuaded to curtail urinating once started, even given that he had a mind to, which Sam evidently had not; even starting to sing some unintelligible ditty at the top of his voice, an act which attracted a great deal of unwanted attraction and adding to the embarrassment of his two companions, while amusing the rest of the curious patrons, who were now standing up, the better to see this impromptu floor show.

After what seemed an age and with a final flourish, Sam finished his toilet, and grinning inanely, allowed Ron to zip him up and lift him to his feet, while an irate Jim flung a lime-green jacket over Sam's shoulder saying with some feeling: "It's a fuckin straight-jacket we need." The two men then propelled the staggering Sam towards the exit, Ron mouthing to me that they would return. I just stood open-mouthed, watching them leave, Sam in his green jacket and cream trousers, looking like like wet lettuce supported by two strands of spaghetti.

I sat down not quite believing the recent incident. The floor around the table was spongy with urine, while cigarette butts dotted the soggy mess, the ash tray also being knocked off the table in the meleé. Empty glasses and bottles of Newcastle Brown lay horizontally on the table, some of their contents being slowly absorbed by the soggy beer mats, while the surplus dripped steadily onto the carpet. I gazed slowly around, now stone-cold sober and attempting to show complete indifference to what had taken place, but well aware of the glances and mutterings from the surrounding tables. My eyes fixed on the bar and specifically, at the glances from the barstaff, who were eying up the beer bottles and belatedly applying the logic mentioned previously. It was then I decided to make myself scarce. Gathering up the hold-all containing a mix of empties and 'live ones', I waited until both barmen had their backs turned, and walked quickly, with as much dignity as I could muster, out of the lounge.

Waiting outside the bar, expecting at any moment to be apprehended by an irate barman, I was thinking of the inauspicious start I had made to my travels, until ten minutes later, Ron and Jim hove unsteadily into view. I quickly explained why I had left. "Ah good thinking bonnie lad," said Ron, relieving me of the hold-all, peering and groping into its depths. "There's a grand thing," he said, "there's three left. Come on we'll gan to the other bar." It was on the tip of my tongue to protest, pleading tiredness, but then thinking it would be churlish of me to refuse their offer of more beer, trudged wearily in their wake.

The 'Rotterdam Lounge', was superior to its sister only by having a fairly plush red carpet, prompting Jim to make the sage observation that, "we should have come here in the first place. This would have

soaked Sam's piss up better". We chose a table that was out of view of the lone barman and settled down. "Reet, get them out Jim," said Ron cheerfully. The deja vu invoked by those words gave me a sudden feeling of impending disaster. Jim delved among the empties, bringing out the three remaining beers from the hold-all. "Aw hell," he muttered. "Wassamatta," enquired Ron. Jim looked up at me beseechingly. "Did yer bring the opener oot?" "No," I said lamely, "I didn't think about it in the hurry to leave." "Ne'er mind," said Ron. "Jim", he said his aide-de-camp, "there's a Swiss army knife in my other jacket in the cabin, gan an fetch it will yer"' We watched the dutiful Jim scurry away, then turning to me and fixing me with a worldly, patronising mien, said, "I always carry it when in foreign parts yer nar." He said this as though they were embarking on a canoeing expedition up the Orinoco rather than an overnight return, boat trip to Amsterdam.

During Jim's absence, Ron thought that Sam's behaviour deserved explanation: "Aye, he has a bit of a problem does Sam, canna keep off the booze yer nar, especially the whisky. He was drunk down the pit once, some years ago, caused an accident, he never forgave himself and goes wild sometimes." I nodded understandingly, then fed up of Sam, changed the subject.

We were just discussing the merits of beer in the various parts of England, and the mutual distrust of the new designer pubs, Berni Inns and the like, when a distraught Jim came rushing up to the table. "Ron, Ron, gasp", he paused to get his breath. "It's Sam, he's wrecked the bloody cabin." Ron at first took in this calamitous message with all the serenity of a Buddhist monk, then his eyes seemed to glaze over. Rising slowly from his seat, he lifted the glass and gulped down the remaining contents, then, with a strangled oath rushed to the door, Jim and I following in his wake. Ron slowly opened the cabin door and we stepped inside. Sam was laid out paralytic on the floor, his trousers down to his ankles. A bottle of Newcastle Brown rolled lazily by his half-clenched hand, the contents having left a thin trail in its meanderings, while the small sink had been partly torn away from the wall, the contents of the wardrobe and a chest of drawers were scattered around the cabin. I took one look at the mess, took in Ron's reaction, and was instantly transported back to 1970:

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It happened one weekend in London. At that time a load of regulars from my local club would go down to the capital for the F.A Cup Final, spending three days in comparative luxury at some hotel. As Sam was the cause of this current mayhem, so it was then with 'Plop'. He was a miner, as were the majority of the men on the annual excursion; although to judge by his appearance, one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise. He stood about 5'7" weighing around 9 stone, while his biceps when flexed looked like sparrow's kneecaps. A resemblance to Charles Hawtrey with anorexia, was accentuated by his wearing of

round wire-framed, National health glasses held together by pink sticking plaster. This frail physique was not however his only handicap. He had yet another disadvantage, one that had earned him notoriety throughout the village, in that, after over-indulgence in alcohol, his sphincter muscle was inclined to over-relax, leading to a sudden, unfortunate evacuation of his bowels. These unfortunate occurrences seemed to happen without warning, with many a party being disrupted as he was transported outside to the toilet of some miner's terraced house in order to clean himself up.

It was Saturday night, and in the hotel everything had gone well so far and no problems with drunkenness or rowdiness, as around half a dozen of the party were quietly playing cards in the lounge of the hotel. Suddenly, Harry, who had been up to his room and toilet to freshen up, entered the room. He was clearly a little shaken as he marched swiftly up to the card table, and casting his eyes round the table until the full attention of the school was focused on him, announced in almost a whisper to the expectant audience, "Come and look what Plop's done." At the mention of Plop's name, several of the men visibly blanched, while one moaned softly, well aware of what the mention of the name could well portend. Rising as one, they followed the retreating Harry out of the room and up the stairs. It was on the landing following the second flight of stairs that they spied the first signs. It was as they feared. Brown, semi-liquid spots splattered the dark blue carpet. They followed the trail which led to one of the communal bathrooms, Harry waiting for them to approach, before flinging open the door with a flourish. "Bloody hell!" said George, among gasps from the others. The sink, bath and carpet was smeared with the brown, putrid-smelling faeces. It was even on the chain handle, the only unsullied place being the pan. "Mine looked like that when I was doing them Epsom Salts," said Tom. "Epsom Salts!" croaked Jack, "by the look of that, he's been doing fuckin' somersaults!"

They followed the trail along the landing to listen, fascinated, outside the bedroom of Plop, one which he shared with his father. Strange twanging noises could be heard from within, and as they slowly opened the door, a strange and never to be forgotten sight met their eyes. Plop was stood on the bed, stark naked except for one sock and his glasses, and true to his Irish antecedence, and with his arms down stiffly by his sides, was attempting a one-man riverdance. His father meanwhile lay under the faeces-covered sheets in a beer-induced stupor, blissfully aware of his son's excremental activities. It took hours of washing and a deal of subterfuge by the disgruntled party to conceal the shameful episode, but provided the witnesses with another tale to tell which added considerably to Plop's already 'odious' reputation. A year or so later, a new steward of the club was engaged, and knowing nothing of the previous year's lavatorial fiasco, told Plop - who had asked for fresh toilet paper - to "hold on a bit." A member of the committee on hearing this, rapidly called over the mystified steward, telling him to drop everything. "Whenever that man says he wants toilet paper," said the committee man sternly,

"get it him - quick."

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"My God," I heard Ron say as I was brought back to the present, "and he was sleeping like a bairn when we left." I helped them clean up the mess, and an hour later was ready for bed. My head was aching, my stomach was queazy, and the sight of Ron and Jim sat on the bed, opening yet more bottles of warm beer from another hold-all was almost enough to make me retch. "Yer na want another bottle then lad," said Ron cheerfully. I daren't speak, I just shook my head, raised a hand in farewell and stepped gratefully out of the cabin.

I awoke fairly early, considering the alcohol that had been consumed, and rose unsteadily. Sitting on the side of the bunk my eyes attempted to focus, while a dull throbbing in my head started up as the remnants of the Newky Browns and whiskies extricated the last amount of penance from my poisoned body. I attempted to rise, hitting my head on the bunk above and promptly sat down again. Holding the offending spot with my right hand, while steadying myself by placing the left firmly on the bed, I tried again to reach a standing position and took a few deep breaths, before feeling confident enough to start a shaky walk around the cabin. The throbbing turned into an ache, while my legs seemed to be detached from my brain and seemed to be moving of their own volition. I sat on the bed once more and removed my clothes - I had collapsed onto the bed the previous night only pausing to take off my shoes. Wrapping myself in my towel I tottered out of the cabin, grateful that the bathroom was close by. Half an hour later and feeling half-human, I dressed and lugged my backpack up to the deck and the wonderful, fresh morning air, reflecting not for the first or last time, on the human body's capacity to recover from our attempts to throw spanners into its normally efficient works.

We soon approached the Europort of Rotterdam, which like all ports is never an uplifting welcome to a new land, and I was scrutinizing my fellow passengers with interest, not having seen much of them during the fiasco of last night. It was then I noticed a tall, slight figure bearing a huge backpack, emerge from the saloon to immediately drop the load with a dull thud on the deck. From where I was sat I couldn't make out if it was a boy or girl, but thought I would have a chat in the hope of gaining information. As I approached the figure I could see it was a young man in his early twenties.

"Hi," I said, "Going far?"

"Home, eventually," he replied.

"And where would that be?" I asked.

"New Zealand."

"That's far enough," I replied. He grinned, and held out a slim hand.

"I'm Steve."

"Pete," I replied, grateful to meet a fellow traveller. He was returning home via Holland, having visited that country on his way to England last year. From Holland he was to hitch down to Munich

for the Octoberfest, before flying home via a couple of places in the Far East. I envied him instantly as the exotic names tripped off his tongue as we chatted easily together, as fellow backpackers flung together in a mutually alien environment are wont to do, subtle vibes being exchanged, both eager for a like-minded companion to chat to.

I noticed the tent strapped onto his pack and remarked that I didn't carry one, whereupon he instantly invited me to share it - "If you want to come down to the 'fest." The 'fest' was of course the Octoberfest in Munich, and given my love of beer I thought it a very attractive idea, and, as it was on the way to Spain, instantly agreed. I had read a little about this Octoberfest, and was more than willing to take part in its festivities. I looked again at the tent perched above his backpack. I had thought mine a little weighty, but it was a mere knapsack compared to Steve's; a tall, green monster, with pockets, zips, belts and drawstrings and evidently packed with equipment, as it seemed to bulge at every corner and crevice. On the side of its aluminium frame were tied a pair of highly polished walking boots, all this, with a tent, sleeping bag, and a green, sponge, ground-mat perched on top. He had also a canvas bag full of camera equipment which he cradled tenderly in his arms, there being no other place for it! It did however have the effect of countering the tremendous weight of his rucksack, behind.

The boat began the business of docking, the tranquil cruise mode of the boat becoming one of sudden activity, the ship tannoy blaring into life and informing car owners to go to their vehicles and foot-passengers to assemble at the marked exit point. I helped Steve with his pack, then flipped mine onto my back. All this time I was nervously looking round for the 'Three Stooges' from last night. I didn't feel like introducing my new-found friend to them, and was trying to dismiss all thoughts of yesterday from my mind. At the tannoy's bidding we surged forward with the rest of the eager passengers down the steps, I following Steve's overburdened figure, while dodging the boots that swung alarmingly from his pack, as we walked over the steel plate of a gangway that led onto the soil of Holland. It was the first time that I was to use the new ten-year, navy-blue passport with its impressive gold lettering, and on approaching the mournful looking official in the passport control shed, flourished it with some aplomb. He gave a cursory glance at me, looked at whatever it is that customs officers look for, then with the sad-eyed, world-weary look of all such officials, dismissed me by returning it and holding out his hand to the person behind me. Steve then led me to where the buses for Amsterdam lined up, and ten minutes later we set off.

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CHAPTER TWO

I was now travelling in a white Mercedes and on the way to the German border. I had parted with Steve not long after leaving Amsterdam, he reckoning quite rightly, that two guys were a handicap when hitching. We had a short, but lively time in Amsterdam though, touring the bars in the red-light district, where he interrupted his drinking to pay a visit to one of those scarlet-lit ladies. Apparently his father had told him not to miss the opportunity, having availed himself of their favours many years ago. He had been absent from the bar only half an hour before he returned. "Well that didn't take long," I remarked. "I couldn't make it last, man," he said, wistfulness tinged with annoyance in his voice. I didn't know him well enough to tease him, content with a snigger into my glass.

Jonny was a tall - most of them are - Dutchman in his 30s, who sported an long handlebar moustache and was going to Dusseldorf on business when he picked me up. When we approached the outskirts of Dusseldorf and at the sliproad to Frankfurt, he dropped me off. I was pleased we had made it before nightfall, being stuck in a large and strange city late at night is perhaps the experience most hated by the lone, on-a-strict-budget traveller, especially when all the cheap pensions are closed and you have no plan of the city or any means to determine a bed for the night, or even where to find the nearest exit out to continue your journey.

At such dark moments, the normally harmless city streets turn into ugly, menacing obstacles. When the harsh neon light and hostile stares of unsavoury, nocturnal characters combine to chill the backacker's spirit, insistent on testing your mettle before the reassuring morning light assuages all fears. Similarly, when one despairs of a lift while waiting in a motorway exit for hours in the rain, water trickling down your neck, are hungry, have no-one to talk to and hear no sound, apart from a hopeful drone and then a dismissive 'whoosh' as an escaping automobile swishes by, leaving you with only the blurred images of warm, comfortable passengers and their startled, staring eyes of incomprehension. At these miserable times, one feels as a snail: small and insignificant, lost in a giant world that rushes by and pays you no heed, one which sees you only as a curiosity, a quaint distraction with no possible role in the scheme of things, and seemingly intent on grinding you into the earth.

Two days later I was heading for Munich, leaving Frankfurt behind. It was formerly 'The Ford of the Franks', where Charlemagne, the founder of the First Reich in 800AD had once resided, now it was a pristine cathedral to Mammon. Its sheer functionality as a centre of business and finance made me nervous, as did its clean streets and its spotless skyscrapers of glass. It symbolised a post-war Germany where the strength of the D-Mark was integral to the Prussian concept of hard work, and also lent Germans a sense of identity, enabling them to forget their part in the second world war. I was glad to have left

it behind.

I was used to English cities like London, Manchester and Sheffield, where tumbleweeds of newspaper or polystyrene, fish and chip containers rolled breezily into dog-faeces, kissed for one brief moment then flung themselves free to roam unhindered. In Frankfurt, such jetsam would have been seized upon by the eager street cleaners like a terrier attacking a bone. While there I wandered into a public toilet; this too, gave the impression of unnatural cleanliness and propriety. Back in England, such a toilet would have been installed for the Ideal Home Exhibition. I remember walking into a public toilet in London some two years before. There was no toilet paper, no locks on the doors, the windows had been smashed and graffiti scrawled everywhere. I asked the wizened, old attendant for some paper and commented on the state of the place. "Yers mate," he said, wheezily, "I know, anyone who comes for just a crap now's like a breath of fresh air!"

As I headed south it seemed to be getting warmer, which I suppose it should. I had just crossed by foot into Bavaria, and was greeted by a large sign bearing the legend: WILLKOMMEN IN FREISTADT BAYERN, and alongside, a sign for a village. I sat down on the grass verge to mop my brow and rest. I had done quite well with lifts, not waiting more than three hours, while sleeping at night in convenient woods, or once in an old dilapidated cowshed, but apart from the bestowers of lifts, had spoken with no one; except a few halting words to a French boy who was also heading for the beer-fest, this faltering conversation petered out pretty quickly though, leaving us both a little embarrassed. What a barrier language can be!

Consulting a map, I decided to turn off into a side road that led to the village some 10 ks away. I stopped and sat on a comfy-looking knoll of grass, wishing that I was wearing proper boots instead of 'trainers', a description of the footwear not known by that name at that time, but was in any case, a definite no-no in the 'Hitch-Hiker's Guide'- the excellent 'Lonely Planet' guides not, as far as I knew then, available at that time. The sun shone with a suprising intensity for the last week in September, and the sweat trickled down my back as I shrugged off my backpack and then took off my shoes and socks, feeling the cool texture of the grass on the soles of my feet and looked down expecting steam to escape. I gazed around me for a few minutes, absorbing the tranquility now I was away from the roads and traffic. I took off my T-shirt, laid back, thought of England and what I would have been doing back home. I smiled to myself thinking of my former colleagues in a stinking factory while I was listening to the trill of nearby birds and a faint lowing of cattle in the distance. An errant bee buzzed lazily by as I basked in the unaccustomed autumnal warmth.

I awoke not instantly, but by varying degrees, as though loath to return to reality. When I looked at my watch, just twenty minutes had elapsed, but had seemed hours. I had no recollection of my dream, that

is, nothing that I could pin down and by a process of backtracking, say that the dream had any definite plot or story. I had, as one often has, just the barest glimpse, a thread in a tapestry that, as soon as one attempts to trace its course, unravels, to leave you frustrated and bemused. Although I had only been travelling a short while, at the back of my mind had arose doubts about my journey. What was I doing in the middle of Europe all on my own heading for an obscure British pub in one of the cheapest holiday resorts in Spain, and what would I do when I got there. It was the end of the season, where would I go afterwards? Now though, I knew that it was right for me, and as I reached for my backpack I felt strong and alive, and fat with freedom.

One hour later I was seated outside the 'Gasthaus zum Adler', on a wooden bench set against a whitewashed wall, and there in the shade a large parasol set in the middle of the table, I took a slug of my first Bavarian beer. It was a half litre and had a good half inch of foam on the top, which is exactly as it is served in Yorkshire, not flat and unappealing as in the South of England. It looked light and innocuous, but as I worked my way swiftly down the glass, the beer leaving a foamy coating on the inside, I could tell there was a hidden strength inside its bland exterior. Swiftly despatching the foaming contents, I ordered another from the young waitress and asked her about transport to Würzburg. Although I had set out in an effort to achieve my destination by means of hitching only, I felt little dent to my pride in employing public transport, and with the information she supplied I took a bus to Würzburg, slept overnight in a small park, then boarded a train which delivered me to the Bavarian capital of Munich a few hours later.

I fed my way through the people in the Station, then, glancing at the giant train schedule, I stood for a moment to absorb the feel of being at one of the great crossroads of Western Europe, the names on the board spelling their exotic destinations: Milan; Vienna; Amsterdam; Istanbul; Athens. I let linger in my mind for a minute the thought of my taking the 'Hellas Express', to the birthplace of democracy, then, putting my dreams back in their box, I tore myself away and headed for the expanse of daylight beckoning me onto the street. After walking a hundred yards I knew that Munich was different to the Germany I had seen hitherto. Perhaps it was the portly, beer-flushed drunk with his embroidered leather shorts, colourful stockings and small, soft, grey hat impaled with a brown brush of a feather, who was making a determined but vain attempt to keep a straight line as he crossed the busy road. Or perhaps it was a faint hint of merrymaking emanating from somewhere I couldn't quite pin-point, which seemed to ebb and flow in between the roar of the traffic. The vibrations I got from the place, told me of a city that had not fully subordinated itself to the supposedly rigid, German work ethic. It was like the other cities in Germany, thriving and prosperous, but somehow found time to enjoy itself. Something of this sort I had read in a guide book, but now I could feel what they were trying to tell me. I even

saw a few stray paper cups littering the gutter, and horror of horrors, an empty beer bottle! It was a definite contrast to the antiseptic veneer of Frankfurt and relaxed me instantly.

According to my 'Guide', in order to get to the campground I had to head for an area between the river and the zoo, but first I had to pay a visit to a pub; though not so much for a drink, and not to just any pub. Ever since I had read William Shirer's excellent 'Rise and Fall of the Third Reich', I had developed a fascination for that particular era in Germany, and one of the events in Hitler's rise to power occurred in the pub where I was now bound - The Hofbrauhaus. By the time I had reached the Platzl square in which the famed watering hole was enclosed I was ready for a drink though, and marched determinedly through one of the entrance arches where I was almost bowled over by six young Australian girls in shorts, arms linked, singing 'Waltzing Matilda' at the top of their voices as they careered out.

Entering the cavernous interior, I elected to sit at the nearest empty table set against a wall. All could seat about twelve people, and were in the Bavarian style, plain and thoroughly scrubbed. I sat down facing the entrance the better to observe the comings and goings and perused the menu, decorated in the blue and white diamond pattern of the Bavarian flag. I ordered a beer from a waitress and looked around me at the half-full hall. It was a large room laid out with the simple, long and plain wooden tables interspersed with yellow pillars, soaring like gigantic chanterelle mushrooms to the high vaulted ceiling and decorated with scrolls of the Bavarian flag, some large plant, perhaps a hop plant, a pig's head, and other designs I couldn't quite figure out. Meanwhile, a Bavarian band dressed in lederhosen and frilled shirts, played on a podium amid a faint aroma of cooked flesh with a hint of sauerkraut, while the buxom, dirndl-dressed waitresses performed their tasks with a quiet efficiency through an orderly hum of voices.

I ordered a Kassler rippchen (smoked pork chop) and a potato salad with a half litre of beer. Thanks to my German guide book and a week of travel, I had had ample time to learn about some aspects of German culture, of which food occupies a more than large part. A fact which could be quickly ascertained by a mere glance at the solid burgers to the left of me, obviously tourists, and according to several T-shirts they wore, from Berlin. The long wooden benches must have borne many a weight in their time, but not I suspect, many that would have surpassed the ten hefty trenchermen adjacent. They each appeared to have ordered the same dish, Schweinsaxe: a huge, roast pig's hock served on large oval plates, with two large bread dumplings and a mound of sauerkraut, all drenched in a thick brown gravy. A separate salad dish lay alongside, and a large wicker basket of bread rolls was on hand, just to fill any gaps. All this was washed down with one litre krugs of foaming beer, which they clashed together whenever the band roared out the few bars of the Hofbrauhaus signature tune, a

catchy little number which had the benches groaning in protest rather than harmony. I watched the 'Beasts from Berlin' fascinated, as now in the death throes of their meal, and like famished wolves, they lifted the bones to their mouths, gnawing frenziedly at them in an attempt to extricate every strand of meat from each crevice, the grease coating their lips, chins, moustaches and beards.

I was brought back from my absorption of their table manners, to my own newly arrived and modest fare, which I demolished within ten minutes. It proved just enough however for my now re-trained stomach and was delightful. Draining my glass I hailed a passing waitress to order another. I was feeling - apart from my blistered feet - really well. The week of hiking had toned and conditioned me to a new height of fitness. I must have lost at least seven pounds, and even displayed the beginnings of a tan. I leaned back against the wall, watching people file in and out, while basking in the atmosphere and the music, contented and at peace with the world. Looking around me it was hard to imagine the pre-war events that had taken place here:

The motley crowd that had gathered to listen to the leader of the recently formed 'National Socialist German Workers Party', an insignificant looking Austrian with a toothbrush moustache, who was trying to inspire a ragged bunch of ill-fed, embittered and desperately poor people, ravaged by the aftermath of the first world war and smarting under the perceived injustice of the Versailles treaty. Subject to rampant hyper-inflation and poverty, they were looking to him to give them a life-line, a fervent desire that this man with his hypnotic oratory could somehow fulfil their hopes and simultaneously resurrect the German nation. I could hear the thunderous cheers when Hitler had finished his rousing speech, and the general air of jubilation.

It was then I was rudely brought back to more contemporary rowdiness as the Australian girls came bursting back in the famous hall, laughing and singing. As I was the only one sat at the large convenient table I just knew they were going to join me. My first impulse was to flee. I felt irritable at their intrusion into my thoughts; and in a place steeped in such history, their brash, irreverent, antipodean high spirits seemed suddenly blasphemous. However, as I prepared to grab my pack, I noticed on closer inspection, that they all seemed very attractive. As I had predicted they had joined me at the table, with casual nods and hellos among the giggles. I listened to the chatter without appearing to do so, not feeling particularly inclined to join in. Six girls, even had they been sober, is daunting company for a lone male. I was however starved of English conversation and gradually began to enjoy their lively banter.

I find that young girls' inhibited conversation is always a refreshing and often amusing experience, and this was heightened by that curious Australian uplift of the words at the end of many sentences, almost making a question out of a statement. Finally I determined to say

something, however banal, and during a rare lull in the conversation I interjected:

"Er, I suppose you're here for the Octoberfest?" Six pairs of eyes turned on me.

"Yeah that's right," said a girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, who was seated opposite, farthest away from me, and nearest to the Berliners. She seemed eager to talk and offered to sit nearer, swinging a bare leg over the bench and walking round to sit beside me. This invited a cacophony of wolf whistles and cheers from the 'Beasts' who, having finished their meal seemed to have eyes only for the girls.

"Fucking Idiots," she murmured as she sat down beside me.

"Boys will be boys," I remarked.

"They haven't been boys since they were in the Hitler Youth," she shot back. I laughed, and had an inkling that this was no ordinary girl, at least not like one that I had ever met before.

"My name's Ingrid," she said, as she introduced me to all the girls, one of them being her sister, Anna, who had the same beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes, although it must be said, comelier of face. We chatted amiably, while the lecherous looks and occasional shouts from the next table, eventually caused some of the girls to answer back, a response that didn't seem to fit in with their macho game of girl-baiting, and suddenly, one of their number, a giant with a beer-flushed face and porcine features, swayed up to the table and looking directly at me, unleashed a tirade of what I definitely knew to be abuse, but what to my uneducated ear, may as well have been ancient Greek. At this point my mind was saying: "He must know we're not Germans," meanwhile I was looking at him blankly, conscious that my mouth was open and wanting to say something, but unable to form anything. He obviously thought that by speaking his own language loudly - like the British do - he could be understood, and with his chauvinistic mentality, thought that I, being the only man on the table, with a wave of my hand or a sharp word could bring all these chattering wenches to heel.

I was still gaping at him, my brain stuck in neutral, when I heard the voice of Ingrid beside me speaking to him angrily in fluent, idiomatic German. To say the man was dumbstruck was an understatement. His mouth hung open and his face flushed an even further shade of red, and after being subject to what seemed like one of Hitler's speeches, was even starting to apologise. Having made her point, Ingrid sat down, while the man humbly shambled back to his table, his friends suddenly quiet and embarrassed for him. I turned to her open-mouthed with admiration. "I knew the language would come in handy sometime," she said smoothly, as she took a large slug of her beer. It happened that she and Anna had Bavarian parents and spoke the language and dialect as easily as English.

"What did you say?" I asked, full of admiration.

"Oh," she said nonchalantly, "just that they started it, by whistling and staring at us, and that if he didn't stop bothering us

and mind his own business, I'd ram what's left of that schweinsaxe, up his arse!"

They were not like British girls in their confidence and brashness, or so it seemed to me at the time. With hindsight, it is not the nationalities that are so different, as the people who are willing to travel and perhaps work abroad that differ from their less intrepid brethren. They were also doughty drinkers; which surprised me, as their looks, figures and general well-educated observations seemed to preclude much association with the 'demon drink'. "All Aussies drink," declared Ingrid, with a forced belch that brought disapproving Teutonic stares, "except for the poofsters." Neither were they ignorant of the history of the drinking hall in which we were situated, Ingrid having majored in European History, reminding me that the Hofbrauhaus was only one of a number of Munich drinking halls used by Hitler for his meetings, the Bürgerbräu keller being another, where in the early twenties, he fired a pistol into the air.

After another beer it was decided they would take me back to the campground, have a nap, and prepare for the night at the Bier-fest. We made our way out, chatting, laughing and with much singing of 'Waltzing Mathilda', along with 'The Pub With No Beer' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy' among others. None of which seemed to cause the ordinary citizens of Munich more than a lifted eyebrow or a smile. They had of course seen it all before during the Octoberfest fortnight, and accepted it as indulgent parents would, to a child's birthday party. I remember at that time, thinking how much fun it was to strike up such a relationship with girls from another country after only three hours in each others' company, as though it was the most natural thing in the world. It is of course the magic combination so successfully employed by the 18-30 holiday company now: a fun environment, youth, and plenty of booze.

After exhausting our repertoire of songs we caught a bus, and as we approached the campground I could see the throng of merrymakers going to and from the fest. The campground was a revelation to me. It seemed to be humming with a life that transmitted itself beyond it's confines, threatening to spread out and consume the immediate area with the raw power contained within. The sheer vitality and exuberance of unfettered youth having fun. The appearance of the campsite was similar to a rock festival: garbage-bins full to overflowing with empty beer bottles and soda cans; the aimless meanderings; the desultory conversations; a hint of unwashed bodies together with an illicit sweetness in the air; bra's and panties fluttering coquettishly beside T-shirts and underpants on improvised washing lines. And the people, drawn from other lands as iron filings to a magnet, most of whom, apart from a few Germans, Austrians Americans and Italians, seemed to be Aussies, Kiwis or Brits, striking up cautious, friendly relationships, disguised as mild antagonism to each other's culture or their cricket and rugby teams. One had only to be here for ten minutes to be influenced by the vibes of several

hundred like-minded souls gathered in one place, and to be aware of what a force for good or evil can be created by even unfocused thought power. The collective force exuded here though, unlike the Nazi meetings of the twenties and thirties, was definitely one of benign hedonism.

I awoke at 8pm a little groggy. I had needed the sleep and was not quite sure of where I was, thinking at first I was in some German forest. I had slept in my bag just inside the entrance of the girls' tent, which was more like a small marquee. The girls were now bustling around and applying make up. All except Ingrid.

"I don't bother with that stuff," she remarked with disdain. "You can't improve on Nature, I'm lovely as I am." I had to admire her confidence. Many a girl would have despaired at competing with such beauty as her sister and friends possessed, but she was of that rare breed of females whose intelligence rebelled at that particular recourse to artifice that women through the ages have employed. She was a feminist before her time, without possessing the strident manner which many of her sisters are now guilty of, and was a natural advocate of the cause without being aware of it, and to my mind the more appealing for it. Her only sop to femininity was a spray of underarm deodorant, which she applied after sniffing her armpit and declaring, "kin oath, like an Abo's flamin jockstrap." I can't help but compare her with some girls now, who inexplicably want to ape men behaving badly, which result only in a tawdry imitation. Ingrid could behave badly, but not for any reason other than she was Ingrid.

We set off and just followed the crowd. I had read of the Oktoberfest and its prodigious sales of beer, chickens and roast ox, and of the tents, but had not prepared myself for that first sight. An immense stretch of the largest tents imaginable. I guessed that one would be at least the size of an average football pitch. The smell of beer and food was almost palpable in the air, music came from various side shows and rides, but it was the noise and actions of the people that held the captivating essence of the scene while stereotypes of the nationalities abounded: yellow Japanese adorned with cameras; fat, red-faced Germans in their lederhosen; Aussies with broad-brimmed hats, corks dangling down; a crowd of pale, drunken Scots singing 'Flower of Scotland', and lifting their kilts at young, giggling frauleins. As the vibes of the campground carried an air of laid-back hedonism, here it had turned into one of hell-bent-for-pleasure-lets-get-drunk-as-a-skunk ethos. Crude, but it was after all the fest's raison'd'etre.

Six beer tents represented the main Munich brewers, and the first call was to the 'Hofbrau' tent, which was by this time fairly jumping, with roars of "AUS-SIES", and the answering roar, "KI-WIS." The girls led me to the Aussie contingent, and we sat down at an almost vacant table. I gazed around me in awe at the vastness of everything. Even the waitresses were vast. They were all dressed in the traditional, Dirndl skirts with puffed sleeve blouses, some carrying eight to ten litre

krugs without undue strain, while gliding over the improvised wooden floor like galleons in full sail. It is worth the effort, as some of them can earn £200+ a day in tips at today's rates. The girls were right into the spirit of the thing and shouting along with their compatriots. I could hardly shout with the Aussies, and wasn't brave enough to shout "ENG-LAND," so compromised by shouting "YORK-SHIRE," at the risk of offending any Lancastrians in earshot. From time to time the Bavarian oompah band would give a lively rendition of Bavarian tunes interjected with the Hofbrauhaus song, at which, everyone linked arms and seemed to join in: "In München steht ein Hofbräuhaus - oans, zwoa, g'suffa!" There was also the short one-liner, and sang twice: "Ein Prosit, Ein Prosit, G'gemütlichkeit," which was repeated at half-hourly intervals, terminating in the universal clashing together of the weighty krugs.

As Ingrid and I allowed ourselves to be captured by this licensed anarchy we warmed to each other even more. Apart from her looks, it was easy to forget you were with a female, and one who was hoping to become a lecturer in history. She was a natural comic, and made witty and earthy 'Aussiecisms', making me laugh out loud. After another beer, we stood on tables, shouted like fairground barkers and generally acted like two-year olds on crack cocaine; in fact, like the rest of the surrounding Antipodean set of under thirties.

Such infantile behaviour can however, become wearingly moronic, and I was relieved when Ingrid asked if I wanted to go to another tent. The rest of the girls, several of whom were now in the act of being chatted up by slavering compatriots of theirs, expressed no desire to follow, but I was more than willing to escort her, and so we departed unsteadily, leaving the rest of the girls with their respective beaus and the alcoholic hordes of Aussies and Kiwis still trying to out-shout each other. We walked slowly, talking and laughing, high on the alcohol and the vibrations of noise, distant shrieks and tumult that surrounded us. I grabbed her hand to lead her to a T-shirt stall, where we looked at the different printed designs and she explained what she could of some obscure, Bavarian words. There was one printed in English that I particularly liked. 'Preuss (Prussian) is nice, Bayer(Bavaria) is higher.' I noticed after a while that I was still holding her hand, and while looking at her squeezed it, she smiled, and squeezed back re-assuringly. We continued on hand-in-hand to the next huge tent that had the famous legend 'LÖWENBRÄU', above its entrance.

Ingrid was suddenly quiet now, as if in deep thought, I in turn was wary of saying anything for fear of breaking the spell we both seemed to be under. I sensed however that she would soon say something, and finally she spoke: "Jesus, I could piss like a stallion." We entered the tent laughing and happy with each other, like two old friends meeting after a long time parted. In the days that followed, Ingrid and I were content to be in each others' company, only visiting the fest twice more, agreeing that more than three times is simply

covering old ground. The first time is invariably the best, subsequent visits start to pale by comparison. "Only morons go every night," she declared vehemently, a sentiment I could only agree with as we clung to each other in her sleeping bag one night.

I look back with fondness at that brief spell with her. It was in that period of sexual freedom bequeathed to us by the 60s generation and the pill, and before the restrictions imposed on society by that dreaded disease that would at first so cruelly strike at Ingrid's 'poofters', and before anyone knew, or at least talked about such things as air-pollution and de-forestation; before talk of rivers and seas full of chemicals; when no-one knew what an ozone layer was, never mind that a hole could be caused in it; and before anyone had ever heard of Margaret Thatcher. Oh happy days!

I was now becalmed in a carefree ocean; which fine to bask and frolic in for a while, could not be allowed to continue. I had to set sail, to see what lay beyond, and the next day I told Ingrid that it was time for me to go.

"I want to reach Spain before the season ends completely." She looked at me with those piercing, ice-blue eyes, which could change from a pleasant summer sky to forked lightning in a split second, and I pitied any future pupils or colleagues who would incur her wrath. "I wish I could go with you," she replied. "You're so lucky living in Europe, with all this...." she waved her arm about, "this culture and history." We in Europe, often take for granted the history that lies on our doorstep. I remember Ingrid's look of wonder when I told her that the 12th century castle used by Sir Walter Scott as background for his famous novel 'Ivanhoe', was just a fifteen minute walk from my house, and that the nave of the nearby church pre-dated it by about four centuries!

We were in the middle of Munich's 'Englischer Garten', a peaceful haven from the frenetic Oktoberfest, just strolling hand-in hand, chatting and laughing, the things that young people do the world over, hardly cognisant that we were in a city that 40 years previously, had been the crucible for the melding of an evil that had attempted to dominate the world, and that was now lazing in a post-war prosperity that enabled youth from different lands to meet up in harmony and peace.

On that final day and with Ingrid trudging alongside, I made my way to the bus stop. There was nothing left to say, everything had been wrung out and squeezed dry, we had packed everything into the last two days with visits to all the sights etc, and now only a sad farewell remained. As I clambered aboard the bus and sat down, I looked out through the window at her. She smiled, a thin and bleak smile that tore at my heart. The engine roared into life, I raised my hand in a wave, she held her right hand above her head in reply and blew a kiss with her left. I turned away as the tears began to prick at my eyes and felt an aching sadness. I never saw her again.

CHAPTER THREE

My first few steps out of Munich were taken with an impatience to be once more on the road, tinged with regret at the leaving of Ingrid, Munich and its beer. But my mind was now set on Spain again and to catch up with the sun, which despite smiling on me for so long was now signalling the end of its summer intensity in such northerly climes, the cool Munich air telling me I was leaving at the right time. As I stood at the exit road to Innsbruck, the exhilarating feeling of independence grew again. Despite my rough clothes and humble status I was experiencing a burgeoning confidence, and in my brief courting of Ingrid, I had discovered the new and satisfying delight of forming a relationship with a girl from another country. One that several weeks ago I would have had only in my dreams.

It was October 4th 1975. I didn't know it then, but someone else was also crossing borders, but for a different reason. It was the day when William Hayes, an American convicted in a Turkish gaol, finally escaped into Greece. His story was to be widely known in the subsequent film, 'Midnight Express'. I waited for about an hour, until a chic, middle-aged German lady, picked me up and drove me to her destination, a town called Garmisch-Partenkirchen, at the foot of the Bavarian alps. I recall she said something about work was to be had in an American base there, but paid little heed. I was too caught up in my new emancipated state to bother with such trifles. Like Mole in the 'The Wind in the Willows', as he forsook the spring cleaning of his dark, musty home and popped his snout out into the sweet air of a large, sunlit meadow. I was busy with a new life of adventure.

It was late in the evening and growing quite dark as the gracious lady dropped me off in Garmisch, saying Innsbruck was straight ahead, and before long I passed a large brightly lit sign reading: INNSBRUCK MITTENWALD and SKI STADION. I called in a small gasthaus for a snack and tasted my first sauerkraut, its bitter tang with a hint of juniper, combining well with the fat, spicy wurst and the boiled potatoes smothered in a rich, brown gravy. I had made it a practise to eat a hot meal once a day whenever circumstances permitted, the rest of the time carrying bread rolls and a plastic container of butter, while purchasing small quantities of cheese, ham, jam and the like from supermarkets or shops. In my 'Hitch hiker's Guide' I had read with interest, advice on how to travel on various budgets. the section on how to live on £1 a day was I thought humble enough, till I continued to the section on how to conduct one's self when flat broke, which was basically just one step above out and out begging! It is no doubt a valuable aid to anyone unfortunate to find themselves in such a position, but it left me wondering how I would react to such dire circumstances, and one I didn't wish to think about. There are of course, those who look on such circumstances as a challenge, I myself am a quite independently-minded free spirit, and a mere glance at a map can still stir the nomad inside me, but could never imitate - lacking the necessary asceticism - those brave souls who write to that worthy publication describing their survival techniques, while tramping the length and breadth of Europe, eking out an existence. After washing down my meal with the obligatory beer, I departed in the direction of Innsbruck, passing an American hotel with the most un-American name of 'General Von Steuben', and within another hour I obtained a lift and departed that town, little knowing that that one month later I would be back there, and that it would consume seven of the best years of my life.

It was around 10pm when I was dropped off at the side of a small wood that

was set back off the main road, and which looked a likely place to bed down for the night, so laying out my olive-green, ex-army sleeping bag with waterproof underside, stuffed with down and guaranteed to keep the coldest nights at bay, I snuggled down, and with a last lingering look at the pale moon that would also be casting its rays down on England, drifted off to sleep.

I slept well, despite hearing rustlings and what sounded like snorts of some kind during the night, and when I awoke I breathed in the cool, crisp mountain air. It was decidedly chilly, while the mist had descended to hang eerily around the fir trees, but each lungful of air had a pristine, almost tangible tang to it, which mingled with the damp, fecund earth and newly fallen leaves around me was magically invigorating, and unlike anything I had hitherto experienced. It made me feel somehow, more alive.

Some twenty minutes later a young man driving a yellow V W picked me up. "You have slept in the wood?" he said, rather concerned, and jerked a thumb back at my resting place of the previous night. I nodded. He laughed and slapped a huge hand on my knee. "Many Wildschwein stay there, you did not see." I had never heard of 'Wildschwein', but grasped the meaning instantly. So that was the cause of the snorts and grunts - wild boar! My chaffeur was laughing uproariously again at the look on my face. "Ja, they can be mad, ah, ah, ah."

He dropped me off in Innsbruck, where I immediately went into the Piccolo restaurant for breakfast and coffee, and to write a letter home. I wrote of the majestic mountains and beautiful houses, but failed to convey the culture and history of such a lovely country, surrounded by mountains, blessed with fertile meadowland, and a tourist's delight. At that time it meant nothing to me. It was like looking at a set of picture postcards, where one can see the beauty, but fails to appreciate it fully and I seemed to be blasé about it all. This sudden encounter with such idyllic scenery and such an apparently trouble free, secure life for its citizens, were totally at odds with the life in the Yorkshire, mining village I had left behind. I felt then, that I could never aspire to a life in such surroundings and I stayed just long enough to refresh myself then continued my odyssey.

Five days later I was blessing the second-hand boots that I had bought in Munich, as I had had to endure five days of varied and eventful tramping, involving infrequent hitching - all in atrocious weather - sleeping on a rubbish dump in Liechtenstein, being driven on a tour of Switzerland by a camp, English army corporal, who would frequently lay a stray hand on my knee during conversation, but who, in the manner of such people, was highly entertaining, and then a night spent sleeping by a motorway in Lyon, I eventually reached the South of France; and it was only then that the sun came out, restoring my flagging spirits. Two short lifts then took me to the outskirts of Perpignan, where I spent the night on a farm:

I had hailed the farmer in his yard as I trudged wearily by his cottage, hungry and footsore, asking for water.

"Ah, eenglish," he said, "you want drink, eet?" I had sudden visions of steaming coffee, hunks of fresh, home-made bread, and butter from the churn, then, perhaps some home-cured ham with a slab of local cheese and washed down with lip-smacking local wine, and finally a deep, down feather bed for the night. He gave me a glass of water, a bread roll with some hard, stale salami, and showed me a pile of hay in the barn. "Ees good, yes?"

It reminded me of the tramp who knocked at the Squire's door with two dried up crusts of bread, containing a thick dollop of old and dry horse manure. "Could I trouble you for a little salt," said the tramp with a pitiful eye. The farmer looked with horror at the sandwich. "You're not eating that, are you?"

"I'm afraid that's all I could find," said the tramp, piling on the pathos. "Nonsense!" said the Squire. "Go to my stables! There's some fresh, in there."

The following morning I achieved a lift to a small village near Port Vendres, where I bought a bottle of the local, red wine some ripe cheese and a fresh stick of bread, before plodding on. It was around noon as the sun regained its mastery of the sky, bestowing its benevolence on the lustrous grape vines that spread to the edge of the dusty road, all within picking distance, an opportunity that I availed myself of without the slightest compunction. The grapes were plump and bursting with juice, and being already October, I must have pre-empted the pickers by only days. A small brook babbled by the roadside, and I stopped to bathe my feet in its cold, clear water, feeling the smooth, hard stones on the soles of my feet. I then took off my shirt allowing the Mediterranean sun to caress my sweating, grimy body, then opening the wine bottle with my Swiss Army, corkscrew attachment and taking out the abundance of freshly picked grapes, I cut the crusty bread length-wise and slicing the pungent cheese, placed it reverently on the bread before sitting with my back resting on a large tree, and while under its shade enjoyed the plain but magnificent food. After washing off their bloom of dust, insect residue and wild yeasts. I then popped the fruit into my mouth and washed it down with the wine, while musing on the ancient process whereby the former, can be transformed after much care and time into the latter, and the honour bestowed on it through the ages: Cicero remarking that, "men are like wine, age sours the bad and improves the good." A sound and humorous analogy.

On my right were countless acres of grape vines, while to the left I saw more vineyards interspersed with small copses and fields dotted with cattle, and in the distance, the shimmering, sparkling glint of...yes! It must be, the sea. I gazed in awe at the Mediterranean, sparkling and shimmering in the distance, and with that sight, any hardship I had endured in the past few days was now gloriously redeemed. That first view of the Mediterranean was the glimpse of the holy grail I had been seeking since leaving England. It was the realisation that I was within reach of my goal, with obstacles overcome and much experience gained, and with it a deep satisfaction entered my soul; until the combination of the sun, food and wine, invoked in me such a deep contentment that I duly slid into a drowsy slumber.

I awoke to the sound of gay chatter, and observed that two young girls and a young man had pulled up in a red Citroen 2 C V. They looked over as I awoke and smiled, one of the girls coming over to talk. Finding out I was English presented no difficulty as she spoke the language effortlessly. They were from Paris on their way to Spain, calling at a fishing village, then over the border to see some Greek and Roman ruins, and "would I like a lift?"

"Does a vampire need blood?" I replied swiftly.

We rattled down the valley, to enter a small and delightful fishing village with the equally delightful name of 'Banyuls Sur Mer'. It was there that I took a long awaited dip in the ocean, cleaning myself of the sweat and grime I had accumulated since I had taken leave of Munich a week earlier.

I must have stunk like an otter but, as the TV ads of the time were wont to make you believe, "not even your best friends would tell you," least of all complete strangers.

They could all speak English to a varying degree, though the girl that first spoke to me, Monique, was by far the most proficient. She had been born in Kent, with an English mother and French father, then moving to France when she was twelve, and along with her friends, was a student of history at the Sorbonne. She was dark haired, petite and attractive with a ready laugh, and her liveliness reminded me wistfully of Ingrid.

"More intellectual historians" I sighed, as later that night the friends sat together talking history on the terrace of a small cafe overlooking the tiny harbour.'

"What do you mean?" queried Monique. I told her of Ingrid. Monique's command of English was almost as good as mine, and she laughed delightedly as I told her of the idiomatic and vulgar abuse of the language by that Australian.

"You know, that is one thing I miss, the bawdy humour of the English. It is going back to Chaucer and Shakespeare."

"You seem to know a lot about it," I remarked.

"I make it a special subject of mine," she replied.

"What, English humour?"

"No!" she replied, giggling, "swearing in English. I like to swear in English when I am cross, there are so many lovely words to choose from - and no one in France understands." It was clear she was delighting in this chance to converse in English, and I assumed she was torn between her place of birth and the country in which she now resided, that is until I asked her where she would rather live? There was no hesitation, Britain came a poor second. "There is a better education system here," she replied, "also a better economy; more style; a better climate, and of course the food and the wine."

I offered no resistance. I had during my short journey, perceived that things seemed better in the countries I had so far visited. I had left Britain when we were soon to be cap-in-hand to the International financiers, and allowed to take only £500 in currency out of the country! I thought again of the mining village in South Yorkshire in which I had been born and raised, and which a turn of the century publication, the 'Christian Bulletin' had, alluding to the poverty and intemperance, described as, 'The worst village in England', but the grim stories were spiced with humour:

Old Ned, having failed to keep up the payments on his hire-purchase furniture despite repeated warnings, received a knock on the door from the representative of the store. "Yes?" said Ned politely, on opening the door, "what can I do for you?"

"It's about your furniture," replied the man.

"Oh ah," said Ned, "well come in and take a chair."

"Take a chair!" echoed the man. "Ah'm taking t'bloody lot!"

"But," I heard her continue, "I still like the people, and of course the humour. What other country has pub names like Cow and Fiddle or Dog and Duck, and eats food called Bubbles and Squeak, and Toads in the Hole?" I grinned without comment at the unaccustomed plurals, and spent a lovely night discussing history, politics and other sundry matters involving students and travellers.

The next day we continued to a place called I think, Parpluis - I didn't know then if was in France or Spain - where excavations had revealed some Roman ruins. Some of the floor mosaic looked liked it had been done the day before, the mainly blue and white colouring looking fresh and alive, while Monique gave me a free history lesson as they pottered around the ruins intermittently giving little 'oohs' and 'aahs' of wonder, until their curiosity exhausted, they treated me to lunch at a small café, then going out of their way, they drove me onto Gerona rail station, from where I caught a train to Calella. I was on the Costa Brava, heading to the Costa Dorada and last leg of my journey.

Three youths sat on the seats across the gangway opposite. I was lazily looking out of the window at the villages as the train sped by. The contrast after France was starkly in evidence: awful post-war architecture in a faded brown, mingling with modern but equally awful hotels, either built or being built. Fly-blown, deserted tourist cafes stood on worn pavements, displaying signs or the wares and services they no longer traded: Hamburgesas; Helados; Pelequeria; Snaks; Vinos; Se vender; Se alqilar. But with this withering decay were expectations for the future; for this was Catalonia, which had eagerly grasped the burgeoning, tourist, business ethos that attempted to keep up with the vagaries of the still expanding travel market.

"You go on holiday?" The question brought me from my daydreaming, and was directed at me by the nearest youth opposite.

"Er, no," I replied.

"You travel then, no."

"I travel, yes."

He nodded, and seemed to absorb this wealth of information for quite some time, before leaning over scrutinising my face and in hushed tones said, "this regime is bad, no?" I searched his face for a clue then muttered with a shrug of my shoulders, "I don't know." He slumped back in his seat, spoke a few words to his friends and ignored me for the rest of the journey. I felt that I had somehow disappointed him. Franco was nearing death and the Catalans were praying for it to end as quickly as possible. He had hardly been flavour of the month, and now the natives were desperate to receive autonomy and a freedom to practise their language from the perfidious regime in Madrid, but I thought it unwise for me to indulge in political debate on my first day in a country that I knew little about.

I remembered hearing of the American in Moscow who was looking at two cars. One was a Zil, the other a Mercedes. A Russian man approached him and asked him in English, "What car you like best?" After a pause, the American replied, "the Zil."

"You don't know your cars," replied the Russian.

"I know my cars," replied the American, "but I don't know you."

At 9pm the train pulled into Calella. I had reached my destination.

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CHAPTER FOUR

I walked straight up the Calle General Mola, the street that led up from the station, passing the Apples and Pears pub. Glancing in I noticed there were but a few customers sat around the bar and the music was low, a sure sign that the season had run its course and that the bar owners were preparing to close up for the winter. In this part of Spain they had only three good months, and from that, only six very good weeks to make their money. I sniffed the unmistakable aroma of modern, tourist Spain that wafted from the restaurants that still bothered to remain open, freshly expressed coffee, frying olive oil and cheap cigars. I passed by the 'Nags', suppressing the urge to enter and made for the 'Trebol', a fonda that lay further up the street, where I booked a room, took a welcome shower and changed clothes, putting on my Nag's Head T-shirt. Ten minutes later I walked into the pub.

There were about twenty or so people in the bar, who all broke off momentarily from their conversations and looked up as I entered, then finding it was no-one they knew, resumed their chatter. I took the few paces to the thick, black, highly polished bar that was adorned with British bar towels and beer pumps that purportedly offered 'Watneys Red Barrel' and 'Double Diamond'. 'Math', the owner, was behind the bar as I ordered a bottle of 'Estrella'. He eyed up my T shirt as he pulled the top off the bottle.

"I was here two months ago," I said, anticipating his question, "with some other lads from Doncaster - I was singing folk songs one night."

"Ah, I remember," he replied, in his still discernible Welsh accent, "sat there?" He indicated a table in the middle of the room. I nodded, suprised.

"Yeh, that's right".

"All well pissed," he said gravely, while casting a searching glance at me. I had an inkling that he was winding me up, so didn't pursue it. "We're expecting a folk singer in soon to give us a few songs," he said, "a Scots lad, Dave Hinde, did you hear him before?" I shook my head. "He's very good, he plays in another pub here, perhaps you can give us a song as well, later?"

"Er, Yes, maybe," I mumbled. Although in posession of a good voice, I sang rarely, and certainly not before five pints. When I'm sober I sing good, but uncertainly, without feeling. When I'm drunk I invariably forget the words, but in between I am certainly better than average. Someone once said to me, "I think its terrible when someone can sing and doesn't." Well, to my mind it's even worse when someone does sing and can't! As Coleridge wrote: "Swans sing before they die, 'twere no bad thing did certain persons die before they sing."

"Why?" said Math, suddenly, and in a tone that seemed to search for my sanity, "have you decided to come here?"

"I feel at home here - in this pub, anyway," I blurted out,

Although I had only spent a two-week package holiday here, by making the 'Nag's' my local, I had found an ideal public house and one that did indeed make me feel at ease, but why exactly I could not explain. It is as difficult to explain why a cat or dog picks a certain spot in a house to curl up in. It is purely illogical and instinctive. And anyway, I had come in search of a new life, tired of a factory existence. I was young, single, and Calella and the 'Nags', was a good a place as any in which to start.

The 'Nags' was often used as an office in the afternoons for the many workers and used it as the address for their mail. It was a pub that was well known to the regular tourists to Calella, who came back each year knowing that they would not be subject to extremes of music or behaviour adopted in many other bars, and it was for many workers their local, and it was 'Math' who had created this atmosphere and the pleasant vibes that greeted everyone. Math's real name was John Matthias, a tall and athletic looking man in his mid - late thirties, who despite his comparative youth, possessed a head of hair that was completely grey, along with his moustache. He was rare animal for a pub owner, in that he was a shrewd and intelligent man with an easy-going manner, and no desire to 'con' or deceive anyone just to make a fast buck. This reflected itself in the total respect that everyone, other pub owners, Spanish locals, workers and regular tourists alike, accorded him.

I turned from the bar and looked around the room at the highly polished tables. A young and solitary, stocky figure in the corner was reading some book called the 'Glass Key', a strange pastime at 10pm, while the rest of the clientele gave out a satisfying buzz and clink of contentment. Everything was as familiar to me as my own home, and appeared as I had seen it several times in my mind during my two months absence: To my left a poster of Laurel and Hardy was hung on the wall that faced the stairs, which led back and up to an open area having four tables, three of which were set against the wall, where two casement windows were inset that gave out to the street below. Facing me was the entrance to the garden bar, while slightly to the left, the large poster of rugby player, Barry John, covered the old black and white television which was placed some eight feet high on the wall. I had only once seen the TV in operation: for some football match, where there appeared so many shadows I thought the crowd had invaded the pitch, while the sound crackled and fizzed like a bowl of demented Rice Crispies. A far cry from the technology that pervades the British pub scene in Spain nowadays, where satellite TV technology enables enterprising pub-owners to bring to their clientele racing from Goodwood or athletics from Helsinki.

But the latest in technology can still have its drawbacks, as my friend Algy, former co-worker turned pub owner of the 'George & Dragon' some years later, related to me: It was of the time he had collected a pub full of people to watch the Irish national football team play live in one of their qualifying matches for the 94 World Cup. He had spent

several days promoting the match, with posters outside the pub and verbal messages to all prospective customers a week in advance, to be sure not to miss this feast of football.

"Do you know?" he said with disgust, "that I can get about 90 channels from all over the world on this telly, an' there I was, fuckin' about wi' the match already kicked off ten minutes an' trying to get it tuned in. The gaff was fuckin' eavin', all the punters were getting' restless, mutterin' and moanin', It wor doin mi fuckin' head in. Then all o' a sudden, there were a load o' green shirts. Ah! this is it I thought, and fine tuned it. And you know what it was? - Robin Hood in fuckin' Swedish!"

I could tell by the conversation of the people seated close by, that they were workers relaxing after a hard season. I could hear occasional talk of England, Ibiza, Canary Islands and Amsterdam, all mentioned in the context of holiday venues or as possible places of work for the winter. I was about to ingratiate my way in to some of the company hoping to pick up some titbit that would help me find employment, when suddenly the door burst open and a figure wearing a white paper bag over his head, with slits for his eyes and mouth appeared brandishing a guitar, bridge first, like a machine gun. I watched agape, as he shouted: "Kill the Niggers", then pulled off his 'hood' and let out a maniacal laugh. It was my first introduction to Dave Hinde. With his off-the-wall humour and a bit of a wild look in his eyes, he reminded me of a young Jack Nicholson.

Two hours and five bottles of beer later, we were both singing a John Denver song together. Dave had a pleasing voice, but his strength lay in his guitar playing and a way of putting over a song, this, allied with his personality and a vast repertoire, made him an instant hit wherever he went. Dave was quite fluent in Spanish, and also spoke a bit of English, and between songs was giving a plump, Spanish lad, lessons. Henry, a waiter at the 'Trebol', was extraordinarily adept at languages and enjoyed swearing fluently in several, and with Dave's teaching was amazing us with his mastery of Scots dialect, all interspersed with Anglo-Saxon swear words, which for him, carried none of the social opprobrium we British attach to them and so applied them indiscriminately:

"Lang may ye lum reek- ye bastarrd." At 1 am, the pub was in fits of laughter as Dave was trying to teach Henry, "My Old Man's a Dustman".

"Dave, yer a fuckin barrmpot, wot arr gorrblimey trousers?"

Entering the 'Nags' the next night, I found the pub was empty, save for a stocky Londoner called John, nick-named Pluto, who was the one I had seen the previous night, reading 'The Glass Key' by Dashiell Hammet. He looked up, grunted a greeting, then buried himself in his book again. The pub soon filled up however, and around nine, Dave, his girl Mary, her young sister Dolly and her man, Jeff, invited me to the 'Trebol' for dinner. Apart from the irascible male head of the household, the Catalan family who ran it were friendly, used only the

best food, and cooked it on an open grill in full view of the patrons. Henry sauntered over. "Hey, you fuckin' bastards! wot you want?" Normally, being on a budget, my main meal would have been double Egg and Chips with dry bread and smothered in free olive oil and vinegar, but as I was in company it was incumbent on me to splash out a little, so I ordered the menu of the day: Gazpacho, that cold refreshing, tomato-garlicky soup; Mussels in a tomato, oil and herb sauce followed by Red Mullet poached in white wine and flavoured with an olive oil and tomato sauce with a sprinkling of parsley and served with fried potatoes. With bread and a ½ Ltr of white wine, it cost the princely sum of 300 pesetas!

I was making new friends all the time as they drifted into Dave's company, and a farewell party was held at the 'Cock Inn' the following day. There I made the acquaintance of Les, better known as 'Paddy', a feisty Dubliner in his early to mid 30s, he had left Ireland at fifteen, and now spoke fluent Spanish. Apparently, he would just stay in a place for as long as it took to get a bit of money, then simply packing a hold-all, moved on. I was in awe of him. When I met him that night, he was waiting tables in order to earn a few pesetas before moving on to look for his own bar. It was that night that Paddy, Dave, Mary decided to go for a trip to Ibiza and invited me to come along. I was thrilled about this and couldn't wait. Islands have always fascinated me; apart from our own, because we never think of Britain as an island as such. Although the Germans call us 'insel affen' (island monkeys).

Two days later we caught the rickety old train that plied along the coast, where two hours later found us in Barcelona doing the tourist bit, strolling along the Ramblas, lined with plane trees, newspaper kiosks, lottery ticket sellers, shoeshine boys, gypsies selling charms, young boys selling postcards and others crying out their wares. Later we gazed in awe at the surreal, still incomplete, Gaudi-designed cathedral of the 'Sagrada Familia', Dave saying: 'he must have been on LSD at the time.' It is said that a visiting bishop asked Gaudi, "why carve the uppermost turrets when no-one could see them?"

"Ah but the angels would," he is said to have replied.

Barcelona is the capital of Catalunya, and their business acumen has given them a reputation as the hard headed 'Gradgrinds' of Spain, whereby all daily events are transmuted into material gain; totally at odds with the more devil-may-care attitude of their southern compatriots, who delight in tales of their parsimony. Hence the joke about how copper wire was invented: "It was by two Catalans tugging at a one peseta piece."

We carried on and into the red light district, with their sleazy shops, while tarty 'Putas', "senor-eaters," Dave called them, dressed in their mini skirts and sipping at their coffees, took their ease before their night time duties. At Paddy's suggestion, we filed into a tiny

bar whose Asturian speciality was goat's cheese and Cider, the aroma accurately reflecting its comestibles. The cider was poured by the barman, from a bottle held high in his right hand into large pint-size glasses held low in his left. The reason for such fanciful service I couldn't fathom. It was either to impress us or to put a head on the cider. None of which achieved the desired effect. Indeed, the only outcome of such showmanship seemed to be the frequent missing of the intended target. Perhaps this was the reason why the stone floor sloped into a central channel, thus taking away the results of what I thought - pardon the pun - aimless exhibitionism. Walking to the waterfront, we saw the statue of Christopher Columbus, allegedly pointing to the New World - although I believe it misses its target by a few thousand miles - later boarding the Ibiza boat and arriving in the early hours of Sunday morning.

According to certain new age and metaphysical guru's, our planet has thirteen magnetic spots where one's personality is magnified, if you are a little crazy, when in Ibiza, you may well become a lunatic, as it happens to be slap bang in the middle of one of these spots. San Antonio, the village in which we had elected to stay, was like many Spanish tourist spots, an ex-fishing village that had sold itself for an easier life, though not as yet flaunting the hotels, apartments and raucous youth that now dominate the headlines. Staying in a pension that cost less than £1 a day and relaxing by the front, a natural harbour where a few luxury yachts were moored, we saw a tourist Spain that was certainly more upmarket than Calella - not a great feat - apart from the hippie colony that had sprouted up in the sixties, attracted presumably by the 'magnetism'.

On our second night, Paddy, seeking inspiration for the bar he hoped to buy some day, dragged me into a Spanish haunt after seeing a poster advertising that the son of a famous guitarist was playing there. We entered to a smell of tobacco and a conglomeration of other odours, like smoked hams, seafood and sherry. The lighting was deliberately subdued, and a lilt of taped guitar music from the speakers floated over a low hum of voices, while a large bladed fan whirred lazily in the centre of the room emitting a curious grating sound occasionally, as if clearing its throat in protest at the fug of cheap cigarette and cigar smoke which it continuously re-circulated, rather than wafted away. The audience consisted of young couples in dark corners, who held hands and gazed into each other's eyes, content with whispered sighings and sips of their cuba-libres every half-hour, while tables of old men, with berets and grey, stubbled chins, smoked cheroots and sipped at their manzanillas or coñac and picking at small tapas of prawns, the shells of which, were strewn on the floor around them. The Spanish do not normally put discarded shells or husks of nuts in ashtrays, as many British are wont to do thinking they are being neat and tidy. As far as the Spanish are concerned the floor is swept and cleaned every morning, so what's the problem?

The young and slim Gypsy guitarist mounted the small stage. His hands,

like his face, were long, slender and sensual, his tawny, high-cheekbones betraying his ancient Indian antecedents. He picked up one of the three guitars he had assembled, said a few words and began to play. His long fingers fluttered over the strings, moving with a delicate grace, his fine, youthful features inclined to the heavens as though plucking the melodies from the air, the complex harmonies tugging at the soul. I thought it wonderful, and when he broke into the wild, Gypsy chords, the audience joined in with a rhythmic clapping of the hands that spurred him to reach even more into his Romany soul. This was old Spain, Andalusian, Gypsy Spain. It made your heart beat faster and almost begged you to get up and dance with a rose clenched between your teeth. It was a wonderful first insight into a Spanish culture that was as different from the Catalan as the Irish from the English, and one which many tourists seldom sought out at that time, mainly because of their lack of the Spanish language and their fear of the barrier they seem to be reluctant to cross.

After three short days, the three of us made our way back to the boat, Paddy having elected to go to Minorca to seek out the possibilities of a bar there. What puzzled me was that Paddy seemed as poor as a church mouse, yet was swanning around Europe seeking out a business. When I asked him about resources, he replied that he had a friend in England that would finance him. Well, it seemed that things worked out for him in the end, having, the last I knew, an Irish restaurant, 'Mother Murphy's' in Santa Ponsa, Mallorca, where it is well commended by tripadvisor.com.

We were some two hours out of Ibiza and sat on deck. Dave started to sing softly while strumming gently on his guitar. I began to sing a song of Tom Paxton, which Dave attempted to follow: "Outward bound, upon a ship that sails no ocean, outward bound" A few tourists gathered around, glad of this free concert. It was a beautifully warm, starry night as the boat ploughed its way across the placid, western Mediterranean with soft chords and plaintive songs, and one that remains an enduring memory. After listening to our impromptu concert, two crew members invited us down to their cabin for some whisky, which we declined. I was wary of that spirit since my boat trip to Amsterdam, which now seemed a different world and an age away, but was amazingly, hardly three weeks!

As the evening wore on we went down to sit in the large saloon as a preliminary to sleep, presently, an old man came shuffling along the aisle and sat down nearby, I guessed him to be at least 70 years old. He had a long white beard that drifted over a purple kaftan and tied in the middle with a green sash, and over this a sleeveless, embroidered waistcoat. His footwear consisted of grubby, brown leather sandals with extremely thin and cracked soles that curled at the edges like frying bacon, while on his head he wore a small skull-cap with a green bandana wrapped around his forehead. He carried a hold-all of a similar design to his waistcoat, obviously made from

the same piece of cloth. He also possessed a rare and pungent aroma, which had the other passengers edging away gradually until he had created a space around him, which in an abstracted way he seemed not to notice, absorbed as he was, and to Dave's amusement, in the rolling of a small joint.

At that time, the regime of Franco still cast a large shadow, and right wing views still held sway over much of Spain, and in some places, even bare-chested men were told by surly Guardia Civil to cover themselves; so to smoke a prohibited substance in public was foolhardy, if not downright dangerous. Dave, ever the extrovert and the kind person he was, and also intrigued by the old man, felt somewhat sorry for him, and so it was that after ten minutes we were soon chatting away to him as he blithely puffed away on the sweet-scented joint. We also discovered that although he wasn't totally mad, he was getting there:

He was Swedish, and speaking to us in clear if faltering English, told us that he had been travelling for forty five years and now lived in Spain the whole year, spending May-November in Ibiza then the rest in the Canary Islands, eking out a living on a pension paid to him by the Swedish Government.

"Sounds like a good life," I said. The old man looked round furtively, and lowered his voice. "Yes, but I must be careful for the Gasmen," he rasped. We looked at each other, mouthing, "Gasmen?"

"Yes, the Gasmen look for me."

"You should have paid your bill then," said Dave. Mary dug him firmly in the ribs.

"No," croaked the old man, "the Gasmen still look for me-from the war- I must travel-always-so they do not find me." He was convinced that agents of the Swedish Government were following him, and someday would attempt to gas him when asleep.

"I was Swedish secret agent," he said, in hushed tones.

"Sort of a James Blonde," said Dave, casually, a remark which set me off giggling, while Mary dug him in the ribs again. After more ramblings about his clandestine affairs in the war, in which he swore that he was in the plot to assassinate Hitler, and was by the way, the son of a Swedish prince, he laid full-length on the leather seat and removing only his cap, fell asleep. We awoke about 6am. The old man had already gone, and we saw him only when we had disembarked and on the quay-side as he shuffled along, his hold-all clasped firmly under his arm, presumably to catch the next boat to the Canary Islands, and intent on keeping one step ahead of the 'Gasmen'.

After taking coffee and fritters in one of the small back street cafes and after a three hour walk around part of the city, we headed off to a restaurant in Barceloneta - the fisherman's quarter - for lunch, before catching the train to Calella. Looking at the letter I had written home at the time, I noted that we had the menu of the day: salad; beef in a bean and tomato stew; steak and chips; a caramel flan; plenty of bread and a bottle of beer, for the equivalent of £1.

Back in the 'Nags' three days later, Paddy, hot foot from Minorca came in. He told us that the authorities there were dead set against the playing of loud music in bars. I believe that thankfully, it is still a haven for souls who wish to spend a holiday free of the excesses of noise to which their neighbours in Ibiza and Mallorca have succumbed.

The following day I spent in the 'Nags' mulling over my plans. I still wasn't sure of my next step, until Kevin, the Barman, called me over. "Here's the address of a friend of mine in Germany, if you go, look him up." It was an address in Garmisch, the town I had passed through on my way here, and struck me as some kind of omen. Meanwhile, Dave was going to stay with a friend who had a bar in Frankfurt, and Paddy was going to Greece the next day to look at bar opportunities there. A farewell party for him was held in the 'Nags' that night, and although I had only known him for two weeks I was sad at his leaving, as he was - and still is - a great character. Mary and Dolly were desolated at his impending departure, and were in floods of tears, as sentimental 'wind-up' records like, 'Leaving On A Jet Plane', and 'When Will I See You Again', were played by a mischievous Math.

The next day I had finalized my plans; I was to go to Munich by coach with Dave, then onto Garmisch. So two days later, it was another sad farewell for me, as Mary, Dolly, Jeff and Pluto - with 'Glass Key' in hand - said goodbye as we clambered aboard the bus that left from the 'El Be' restaurant on the Barcelona road, heading towards Gerona and out of Spain towards Germany. As I left I felt the almost tangible aching of leaving something that I had hitherto never realised existed, that there was indeed something beyond my previous confined life. It was amazing to think that I had been travelling only a month, yet this had been packed with so much fun, and I had met so many diverse characters, that it seemed that I had been travelling far longer. The kindness, generosity and humour that I had encountered, and the sheer fun of a care-free life without work, petty, British restrictions, rainy days and all the other pressures that made life in 70s Britain such a drag, was one that had me hooked, and I longed to see what more lay in store. But, I also realised that if I wished to continue this lifestyle I had to look for work. So I was eager, yet uncertain, about what lay in store in Germany.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The bus pulled up in Munich after its journey. These were the days before videos, toilets and waitress service made life for the bus traveller tolerable, but having Dave as a travelling companion had relieved the tedium of the trip, and as the journey lengthened our mutual friendship had grown, which made the parting at Munich all the sadder. When looking back, one often has a turning point, a moment upon which hinges the rest of their lives. I now had the choice of either going to Garmisch or go with Dave to Frankfurt. He said that I would find work there and I was sorely tempted, pondering on this for some minutes. Maybe it was the short interlude that I had spent in soul-less Frankfurt that influenced me, but shortly before his train departed, and with a heavy heart, I told him that I would be leaving for Garmisch.

The train to Garmisch leaves the Munich Bahnhof from platforms 27/28 every hour, the journey taking about 70 mins. For the first part of the journey - excepting Starnberg am See, a beautiful lake - there is nothing to write home about, but half an hour later a subtle change occurs: you see more fields and meadows than before, more cows, the appearance of small, neat villages with whitewashed dwellings and gasthouses, and the onion-shaped domes of churches. Suddenly, a glimpse of a mountain, small in the distance, more of them now as the train rounds a bend, within half an hour they are slowly but surely commanding the skyline, jagged and serrated but not totally dominating, until you enter Garmisch, and then you had better like mountains, because you are surrounded by them.

The curious indifference I had displayed to similar sights in Austria on my way to Spain, was now replaced by one of fascination. Perhaps it was the new confidence I had acquired, but I now felt that I was capable of being a part of this beauty and not just a spectator, which enabled me to see things in a different way. I certainly knew that Garmisch began to beguile me, as it did most people, and usually it started with the mountains. Although they were all around, and every one of them imposing in their own manner, the group that most fitted the popular image of mountains were the range located at the border of Germany and Austria, the Zugspitze range. These were the ones on all the postcards, the ones that sold Garmisch to the rest of Germany and Europe as a place to to ski in winter and walk and climb in the other seasons. The Zugspitze, the highest mountain in Germany, was a natural target. This could be reached via the cog-wheel train that winds through a tunnel blasted out of the glacier, or by a cable car from the Eibsee lake in the next village. Clustered around the Zugspitz were the many peaks of different sizes and had their own strange names: The Osterfelder; The Dreitorspitz; The Grosser Waxenstein and the archetypal pointed peak of the Alpspitz. They provided me on those first few months with a curious feeling of wonderment and later a source of instant ease mingled with awe, their commanding height, aloofness and longevity proclaiming their

unchanging solidity in a world that was now rapidly changing. But now my first imperative was to find work, anything would do as long as it kept me here. The guest house where I was staying was costing me DM 8 a day, which for a poor backpacker was a needless and luxurious drain on resources. I sought out John, the friend of Nag's Head Kevin. He happened to be manager of an American Forces Restaraunt-cum-dance hall, 'The International Grill', situated near the centre of town and frequented by many of the armed forces on R&R (rest and recreation), a loose term, that for the majority of its participants meant getting drunk, or in the American vernacular, 'shit-faced'.

To say that Garmisch had an American contingent was to understate their presence. Southern Bavaria was captured by the Americans after the war and had built up several towns as R & R for their troops. Berchtesgaden, Chiemsee, Bad Toelz were others, but Garmisch was the recreational headquarters. There were four American Hotels; the 'Grill'; a campground with bar and store; a ski-lodge with bar and restaurant; a skeet range; a PX with restaurant; commissary with warehouse; a bank; a barbers; a school; a library; a cinema; playing/sports fields; barracks with military and civilian housing; engineering workshops; gymnasium; a chapel and more. In short, it was imported, freeze-dried America.

Around 8pm, on my third night, I wandered into the Grill and into the bar/dance hall section. There were checks by doormen, but this was not strictly observed and I had no problem that first night. It was a fairly large room with a long bar at one end which looked out on the whole room. Red leather lounge chairs attended on small circular tables that surrounded the parquet flooring of the dance floor, which at that early part of the evening remained vacant. Speakers in the walls wailed out soul music as a few black Americans at the bar, cocktails in hand, shuffled lazily on the same spot, while the few whites sat sprawled in their chairs ignoring the blacks and their music, and talking in loud white-American voices. I stood at the bar behind a tall, black GI as he shot a drink order to the barman: "Gimme a J D & C, man". I watched carefully, intrigued to know the result of this code. It was a shot of Jack Daniels splashed with coke. I ordered a mundane beer.

"That'll be 60c," said the small, moustachioed barman. Panic! I never thought I would be charged in American currency.

"Take German money?" I asked hopefully.

"1 mark 60," he replied, crisply. I handed him a DM 2 piece and received the change. Looking where to sit, while ignoring the small cocktail glasses masquerading as tip jars, I wandered to an empty table and sat down.

It was like Gibraltar, an enclave, and it took some getting used to. I drank steadily at the beer, looking around me and trying to make sense of it all, while feeling excited at being among an incongruous, alien culture. Presently, though, a familiar accent broke through the

lazy, American drawls, and drew my attention to a dark, well-built young man two tables away. It was definitely a Geordie accent. I had to talk with him. Two hours later saw eight of us sat around the table. All British except for one Australian girl. It was like my first entrance at the 'Nags' in Calella, where I was eager to find out how the land lay and desperate for information on how to obtain work, still green and a little naive, and not yet bearing the excess baggage of pre-conceived ideas that can make some travellers a world-weary bore. It was there I made friends with 50% of the dozen or so Brits who were in Garmisch at that time. The rest, were a mix of Greeks, Turks, Germans and of course Americans. This International set were either 'living on the economy', or less fortunately, residing in the civilian quarters, where I was generously invited to stay until I found work. It was a building that to its inmates over the years would be as synonymous as Colditz and Devil's Island to a previous generation. This grim edifice was known as the Annex.

The Annex was a building inside the Sheridan Barracks. It was one of four identical buildings, all built to accomodate Hitler's Mountain troops -GEBIRGSJÄGER- who were crack-shots and trained in mountain warfare. Garmisch was just one of these posts that during the war were scattered over the Bavarian alps. The Jäger Batallion may now be history, but the buildings built for them were made to last. The walls were some 15" thick, each room being fitted with double-glazed and double-framed, casement windows, giving an air insulation gap of several inches. These measures, combined with the radiators, ensured that the buildings were warm in the coldest temperatures, which often dipped to -10ø and below, and cool in the summers, which could be surprisingly hot. The outside walls were painted - as were all the barracks buildings - an awful mustard colour, while the interior furnishings and decorations were equally depressing. A mahogany coloured dresser and wardrobe of inferior quality and dating from the 50s was standard issue, and apart from a bed and a bedside lamp was all you had. For the hordes of backpackers that would flock here looking for work in the late 70s and 80s, such trifles would be of no consequence. The rooms were warm in winter, cool in summer, and above all, cheap.

The main drawback was the space afforded to each occupant. The rooms were of varying sizes, which dictated the number of occupants that shared the room. If one had been an Annex resident the longest- which may take three years or more - then you were at the head of the list for a coveted single room, which may only be five metres by three metres, but was heaven if you had to compare it with a three-man room of eight metres by six. On occasions four people had to share this space! All these rooms were of course, to conform to propriety, either all-women or all-men's rooms. The bedspaces were normally separated by poles or rods, suspended on two adjacent wardrobes belonging to you and one of your room-mates, with a sheet, or perhaps some old curtains draped over them to form one's 'boudoir', within which, the whole of your possessions were contained. Such restrictions on one's

space was only made bearable by the usually friendly disposition of your neighbour, but it helped if the occupants worked different shifts, then one could be sure of having some privacy some part of the time, although the majority of people, depending on their attitude to life and the time of year, would be either skiing, cycling, hiking or drinking.

There were three American shuttle-buses that toured the town, stopping at all the four hotels plus other designated American stops, which was extremely convenient, but when there was good weather among the autumnal rain, which could last for days, I was content to stroll around the two towns with increasing fascination. Garmisch had been tagged onto its older neighbour Partenkirchen by Hitler in 1936, and together they formed an impressive attraction for tourists, both having many of their beautiful houses decorated with colourful wall paintings or 'luft malerei' - literally, 'air paintings' - that usually depicted religious, hunting, or historical scenes, while whole streets were often bedecked with an abundance of window boxes in full bloom. 'Chocolate box' or 'tinsely,' were the descriptions I would hear of the environment I was now determined to be a part of, and so it was if one had a cynical view. I only knew that it was a damned sight better than anything I had lived in before. Like 'North' Yorkshire it is an environmental paradise compared with 'South' Yorkshire, where I hailed from, and I unashamedly allowed myself to wallow in it.

The two towns that make up Garmisch-Partenkirchen, could be said to be separated by the Partnach river that flowed by a restaurant, the Weisses Roessl(The White Stallion). Now it is part of a restaurant chain, but shortly after the war, was a notorious den of thieves:

At that time it was leased by a Zenta Hausner, a flaming, red-headed woman, who obtained the nightclub, as it was then, by granting her favours to an influential member of the American Army, a Captain Korner. Frau Hausner otherwise known as 'Garmisch Nell' or the 'Red Princess', was later to be found murdered, a knife stuck through her neck and pinning her to the kitchen floor. No one was ever convicted of the mysterious crime. The Captain himself, an apparently unsavoury character, made a lucrative business dishing out bogus certificates which purportedly declared the recipient cleared of complicity in Nazism. Known as 'Persilscheine', these whitewash certificates were one of the most prized items on the German black market, and one of the most expensive. Looking at that lovely town now, one would find it hard to believe that black market deals on furs, diamonds, petrol, cars, wine, narcotics and gold were struck - mainly in the Weisses Roessl - all with the knowledge of certain U S Army Personnel, many of whom, would subsequently buy homes and businesses back in the States on the proceeds of this illegal activity.#

Of the two towns, Partenkirchen is the more rustic and quaint, possessing two ski-jumps in a stadium built for the 1936 Winter

Olympics, while a natural Gorge, The Partnach Klamm overlooks the icy torrent of water that rushes from the mountains forming the Partnach river, that eventually unites with the Loisach river further down the town. Together with the meadows, mountains, three lakes and seventy two miles of slopes and cross-country trails, they made up the main tourist attractions. It was during this exploration and knowledge gathering that I landed a job. I had already filled out a form for a position within the American organisation, The Armed Forces Recreation Centre - AFRC - but was informed that it would be a while before a position became available. The one I had secured was with an impressive and modern, German hotel 'The Koenigshof', which stood opposite the railway station. Along with two other applicants for positions, Tom, an American from California, and Will, a budding journalist from Wiltshire, I was duly hired at an equivalent of approximately £30 a week with food and board, while Tom was at first refused a job because of his nationality, not being part of the EC, but on pleading, the manager relented. It was all illegal, but who cared? Tom was uncomplaining and willing, and for such a small wage, the manager was more than happy, probably claiming he paid us more, and fiddling a little for himself.

The 'Gastehaus Maier' had a contract with the Hotel to house some of their staff. It was run by Herr Maier, a thin, surly and miserable old man who hated life. I kidded Tom that during the war, he had been kicked out of the Gestapo for cruelty. I could though, imagine him being formerly in receipt of one of those 'Persilscheine'. He had a wrinkled prune of a face, with rheumy eyes and thinning grey hair, and wore a grey, thick, woolen cardigan two sizes too big, which had seen better days, and which he'd probably had from being a young man, if he had ever been a young man! He was one of those people that one could not have imagined to be anything but old and decrepit. I shared a room with Tom and a German man, Jurgen, a man of indeterminate age. He could have been thirty or fifty and was thin to the point of emaciation. I saw him bare-chested one day, and swore I could see the light of his bed lamp shine through him like an X-Ray. He had a face that only a mother could love: high cheekbones seemed to stretch his yellowing, parchment-like skin into creases, his eyelids were hooded like a vultures, while a few wisps of hair attempted to sprout from his peanut-shaped skull. I called him Eli, after the tall, dopey-looking guy who was one of the stooges of the comic, Jimmy James. The German staff had no time for him and treated him wretchedly. I just felt sorry for him. I once gave him a bottle of beer. Giving a sickly grin, and showing teeth that only needed a white one for a snooker set, he then shook my hand. It was a cold, clammy hand, like the walls of a damp cave, and forced me to rush back to the sink to plunge my hands into the hot, greasy water. It was my first introduction to hotel, kitchen work, and was also the beginning of a now firm conviction that ninety per cent of hotel kitchen staff must have either a severe mental condition, or be of a definite masochistic nature in order to tolerate the pressure contained within the hot and frenetic confines of a German hotel kitchen.

The head-chef was clearly demented. A tall, slim Bavarian with a manic look in his eyes who ruled by fear. He was wont when things went awry, which seemed to be every two hours or so, to shout, shriek and hurl vegetables, cutlery and anything to hand at his minions, once throwing a bowl of hot soup at the unfortunate Eli, who always seemed to manage a pathetic, ingratiating grin at the sniggers of the head chef and his moronic underlings. It had all the pathos of a Chaplin film, but unlike that champion of the underdog, his pathetic lack of spirit obviated the denouement of an happy ending for him.

Taking the orders from the waiters, the head chef boomed them out to his acolytes: "PFEFFER STEAK MIT POMMES". "FORELLE MIT REIS." It was a voice that held within it all the dark, teutonic arrogance and love of power that possessed their Nazi rulers some thirty five years previously. He was both fawned over and hated, while the waiters in their green waistcoats, like waiters all over the world, were pathetically eager to please their customers in expectation of a fat tip, but treated a mere dishwasher with no more regard as they would a dog, hurling the spoiled dishes over the hatch, the left-overs spilling and splattering the steel surface. They took care however, not to spill the specialities they savoured, like the left over snails or prawns, which they spooned delicately out of the silver dishes and into their mouths with one of the clean spoons I had to leave conveniently by the hatch for this special purpose. The youngish second chef, Hubert, was unaccountably sane and hated the head-chef with a passion, which endeared me to him immediately. He had me in fits as he once goose-stepped behind him, right arm upraised, and with the forefinger of his left hand stuck under his nose. He used to come into the dishwashing area, partly to practise his English, but it was also a means whereby he could vilify the head chef, knowing it would go no further. The third chef, Dieter, was a creepy, pale-faced youth who abused the staff under him and assumed the role of a culinary Uriah Heep to his superiors, while the callow junior chef had a permanently scared look about him. Then there was Eli, who would even take orders off me, and I was only a Spüler(dishwasher).

A Spüler in a German hotel is the lowest form of life, akin to a leper in biblical times, and I was left pretty much alone. I spoke only with Hubert, Eli, and the woman who served the tiny bar adjacent, whose job was to serve up to the waiters any drinks ordered by the clientele. She would occasionally come from behind her partition the better to talk to me. Frau Hendrix was an extremely large and blowsy woman with a choleric nature, a puffy, dough-like face and long, henna'd hair. She spoke near-perfect American-English, and had been married to an American; though this would hardly seem to be the reason why it seemed to inspire such a hatred of her fellow Germans, a trait which seemed to be exacerbated by a copious intake of Pils beer. I always tolerated her outbursts with equanimity, nodding in agreement at the right moments, as she supplied me with equal quantities of the powerful brew, meanwhile berating the patrons, who were fortunately out of

ear-shot. "PIGS!" She would shout at the waiters' swing door that gave out to the dining-room. "FAT, GERMAN PIGS"! Pigs seemed to be her favourite English word. "They order all this food," she waved her mottled arms around at the left-over food, "then leave it to be thrown away. "THE GREEDY PIGS!" Two weeks into my work there, she got the sack:

She arrived this day in a drunken stupor, and proceeded to exacerbate it by consuming the potent beer with even more abandon than normal. First she verbally abused the head waiter, before swaying into the dining room to berate the customers, then returning to demolish another bottle of beer, she then proceeded to swear loudly in English at the cowering waiters, the mortified manager, and finally the head chef who, knowing no English, was for the first time struck dumb, before she was finally evicted by means of an arm lock applied by the tall, Russian doorman. I watched, consumed with laughter as she was hustled away, shouting, "PIIIGS. FAT, GERMAN PIIIGS!" It was only interludes of such manic instability on part of the staff that kept me going, and my first realisation that the majority of lowly kitchen staff in German hotels were, by reason of the pressure they were under, alcoholics. I did see her again some years later, in the International Grill, with some 4 or 5 young girls around her. I guessed she was now madam for these practisers of the world's oldest profession and was attempting to drum up custom with the Americans.

The worst times were having to return in the sunny, late afternoons watching rich, German frauen with quivering jowls, taking tea on the terrace of the swanky hotel nearby, podgy hands smothering a tiny fork as they delicately transported pieces of delectable cream cake past their painted, ruby-red lips, while I trudged with a heavy heart, that sank further with every step, back to the encrusted pans and dishes that had mysteriously accumulated during my four hours break. This split shift I had to work was a killer. I started at 8am worked until 1pm, then started again at 5pm, until 10-30/11pm. Fortunately the licensing hours, unlike England, enabled me to relax afterwards in the 'Grill' until midnight and later, move to the 'Schmankerl Keller', a convivial nightspot in Marienplatz, where we would be entertained by a Bavarian duo and stay until 2 or 3 am. Anyone who could go home after such a day in the kitchens without a few beers afterwards would be stoical indeed.

After three weeks I had had enough of this sweated labour, and told the Manager I would be leaving at the end of November. I knew, or at least, hoped, that there would soon be work with the Americans, and also knew that I could obtain from one of my new-found friends, a 'doss', a word that would be much used by the Brits in later years, and which crept into the language of Garmisch-Americans almost without their knowing, and which they began to use with almost as much frequency as their British colleagues. Come the glorious day, I hung up my apron vowing never to do such menial work again and was free. As I left, I tasted the air and flung my arms in the air. I could imagine

how released prisoners feel. I did however, stay 'wallowing in the Maier' for three more days, until Herr Maier discovered I had left the hotel and booted me out.

I was now dossing with Sheamus, a Scot who I had met in the 'Grill' that first night, and was now a good friend of mine. He was about my height, of slight build, with fine, blonde hair. He was working as bar-helper at the American, Green Arrow Hotel. During the war it was a German military hospital, and part of it was still used by the Americans as a dispensary/first aid point. He had a single room in the basement there, where lived the staff. It was a labyrinth of a place, that housed its incumbents in much the same manner as the Annex, with the addition of large, whitewashed heating pipes that sprouted from roofs and walls, down the lengthy corridors and into the rooms. Descending into the basement was like entering a submarine, the gurgle and whooshing of water from the myriad heating pipes, and the hum of washing machines - someone was always washing - could always be heard, mingled with a perpetual and slightly nauseating smell of Turkish or Greek food being prepared.

Sleeping in his room while cocooned in a sleeping bag on the hard, stone floor, with only a thin, threadbare and becrumbed carpet underneath, was not the most comfortable of dosses, but I found that if a sleeping draught, in the form of several bottles of the excellent German beer was imbibed before retiring, I could sleep happily in my allotted space; albeit that the next morning I would walk the first few minutes with a wry neck and a hunch back.

Sheamus had a water heating element. A spiral contraption that heated water to boiling point by immersing it in your chosen mug of water and switching on the electric. With this appliance and inferior and purloined, American tea bags and dairy creamer powder, we plumbed the very depths of tea-making. The first time I had the dubious pleasure of taking tea with him, he dunked the cheap quality bag rapidly in the water about five times, then, after first trying to fob the almost spent bag on me to use, I watched in amazement as he proceeded to tie it by means of its string to one of the pipes that ran overhead, for use at a later date.

"You do only use it once, again?" I asked, a little uncertainly and with no little sarcasm.

"Sure," he said, straight-faced. "What ye take me for, some kind of cheapskate?" He went on to teach English at the University of Nevada, and together with his lovely wife, Jean, and once had their house by the beautiful Lake Tahoe, a far cry from those cramped days and frugality in the hotel basement.

I had been out of work for about two weeks, then one one day while in the American gymnasium playing racquetball - a new passion of mine - I was told that there was a vacancy as another Gym attendant, on the afternoon shift, and was advised by Alan, the British gym attendant, to go to the Civilian Personnel Office (C P O) - the army

loves acronyms - and ask about it. The upshot was, that after three days hanging around the office I was directed to see the Captain, and after a cursory look at my application form, was hired. I have related that tale in the years that followed and was met with incredulity that such a laissez-faire attitude ever prevailed in the C P O. In later years the processing for the amount of people wanting such work would be horrendous.

As a 'local national' one would have to be first registered at the Rathaus (Town Hall) in order to obtain a certificate of registration, which then had to be taken to another building to get an 'aufenthaltserlaubnis' (residence permit) and if working in hotel kitchens, one would also have to undergo an x-ray, and obtain a clean bill of health. All these must be obtained before starting work, and all this necessitated much form filling and producing of id's and passport photo's, which meant dashing around like a demented dervish until everything was squared away, and only then was I officially working for AFRC, or 'A FARCE' as it was popularly known.

It was now mid-December, and I was creeping upstairs into a loft-room belonging to the family of a German girl, Renate. I got to know her after a night at the Green Arrow Hotel while celebrating my new appointment. I had been working a week, but as yet had no official place to rest my head, and tired of Sheamus's cramped quarters, took up the offer by Renate of a bed in the family loft, providing I was quiet and closed the skylight before leaving in the morning. Leaving was no problem, it was entering at night that was difficult. It wasn't easy at three in the morning and after consuming a gallon of German Beer to obtain one's goal: first locate keyhole, with one eye closed for better focus; slowly open door; negotiate step; close door; make way to foot of stairs in dark; start to climb stairs; stop occasionally to curse inwardly at every creak; miss grip on bannister; take drunken step backward with thoughts of crashing in a paralytic heap at bottom of stairs and rousing irate family; make way to landing; pause to take big breath as I was now suffering from nervous exhaustion; then tackle final flight to loft before collapsing on the bed as though I had just climbed the Zugspitze.

Needless to say, this tenuous, nerve racking arrangement failed to last very long. One day I left the skylight open to the rain, resulting in one wet bed, one irate mother, and myself homeless again. Taking refuge in the Annex once more, I eventually managed, through an army captain with whom I played Racquetball, to obtain a room, a single room at that! Now I was in the position where I could bestow benevolence to other waifs and strays that seemed to be pouring into Garmisch, hearing on the mysterious, backpacker's grapevine that there was a place in the Bavarian Alps that had all a young person could need: work, a great environment, a doss and good, cheap beer.

One of these strays was Mick, an old army friend of Alan. He was a

nice guy, but another with a weakness for alcohol, he even sampled the rubbing alcohol we had in the Gym to be used for injuries, and told of tales straining Brasso through nylon stockings! A probably apocryphal story, but who knows? Mick had also been one of Sheamus's tenants, but had been caught dossing there, so had elected, tough battle-hardened lad as he was, to sleep in Sheamus's car. The car was a V W Carmen Ghia, for which Sheamus had paid \$200 and was his pride and joy, but was not a model noted for its spaciousness, and Mick was 6'2". At nights, and after liberal doses of the same soporific used so successfully by myself, Mick would make his way to the snow-carpeted Green Arrow car park and curl up in the back seat. Now Sheamus had taken up skiing in a big way as the slopes were now open, and was wont to go early in the mornings, returning to start work on the afternoon shift. Unfortunately Mick, or 'Rough Mick', as we labelled him, would still be so comatose from the night before, that he wouldn't wake until noon, then, wrapped like some dishevelled mummy in a stained, white bed sheet at the foot of some distant skiing location, he would groan and curse himself back to life, red-eyed, tangle-haired and furry-mouthed, while concerned parents dragged their staring, transfixed children away from this strange apparition, rising wraith-like from the back seat.

I started to get into the culture of Bavaria and decided to learn more about its history. In this I was helped by making the acquaintance of Keith, an American from Indiana who was a tour guide, and took the mainly ignorant, American military families on their culture tours. One of his tours was to 'Neuschwanstein Castle', that folly of King Ludwig 2 who, unfortunately, died in mysterious circumstances.

King Ludwig was entranced with tales of Teutonic Knights and built an edifice to his own romantic image of them, much to the disgruntlement of the local peasantry of the time, who were forced to pay for all this largesse through their taxes. In later years the Bavarian Government would bless such folly, as the subsequent remuneration afforded them by tourists anxious to see 'Mad' King Ludwig's castle, generates immense income. It is indeed a magnificent monument to a man's fantasy, being built on a rocky outcrop that commands a view of the village below, the white, mediaeval-looking turrets and towers rising majestically to the sky, with the mountains in the background, the adjacent 'Alpensee' lake, and surrounded by a forest of splendid fir and pine trees. It is a tourist board's dream. It was unfortunate that some of Keith's G I clients didn't share the same romantic mentality as King Ludwig. One day I found myself aboard the bus that left the tours office with twenty or so Americans, either military or dependants of military personnel, upon seeing the turrets of the castle, a G I lifted up his son to the window saying: "Der yer go son, dat's Walt Disney's castle." I was assured by Keith that some of the GI's actually thought that Neuschwanstein was built *after* the one at Disneyland. More apallingly, on being told that the bus went through Austria before turning back into Germany, several have been known to ask if they would see kangaroos!

Most American GI's maintained a reasonable standard of fitness, but many of them and especially their dependents were obese, and had also been force-fed military protocol and doctrine so much that one had the impression they would have had to ask for permission to take a crap. Their ignorance of anything outside America was amazing, and in the case of the younger GI's, the liberal use of marijuana only added to their woolly-mindedness, but could be amusing: I was sat at a table in the Green Arrow Hotel one night, when I was joined by two very relaxed GI's. After some small talk, and obviously noting my accent, I was asked where I came from. "England," I replied, flatly. The GI looked at me blankly. "What part of the States is that, man?" he asked. I made my excuses and left. And once when leaving the Schmankerl Keller, I was asked for directions to a night club by a drunken G I and his sober friend. The drunk attempted to ask the way in German, I answered in English.

"You speak good English," he slurred. His friend rounded on him. "He speaks better fucking English than you, man!" Sheamus, in his white, bar-helper's jacket, was once approached in the corridor of the hotel by two GI's, asking where they could, "get something for the head, man".

"Well, ye can borrow ma tammy," he said to the bewildered guy.

That winter of 1975/6 is remembered as being one of the best ever for skiing conditions, even though the climate in that comparatively low altitude ski resort has changed to a milder one in recent years. Not that I was an enthusiast. I was not of the view that wrapping oneself in layers of clothing in order to combat freezing conditions, then paying good money to be surrounded by hordes of beginners who strap two planks to their feet and career down icy slopes waving potentially lethal ski poles in the air, was a pleasant, or indeed a safe way to spend my days off. Contrary to my prudence when it came to skiing however, and along with half a dozen other foolhardy youths, I would think nothing of traipsing up to the gasthaus that was located almost halfway up the 1800 metre Kramer mountain, on a freezing, twilight night, in order to slide down the small and icy rutted path on bits of sheet plastic, or anything 'slideable', while being out of my brains with alcohol.

My opinion concerning skiing was shared by many of the British Army contingent that came down in January on an exercise known as 'Snow Queen'. They stayed at a 'Keans Lodge', a former skeet range, which enclosed a log cabin large enough to house twenty or so specimens of British manhood, most of whom would rather wile away their time in the pubs and hotel bars, rather than improve their skiing efficiency, and I spent many crazy nights with them as we watched the British bands that were employed in the more down-market U S hotels. In their final week, the end of February, a party was arranged at the lodge. It was an ideal place as it was miles from anywhere at the foot of the Kramer mountain. Transport was available in the form of the large British army lorry, referred to by the squaddies as 'Mrs Windsor's Wagon'.

Beer was there in abundance in the form of 10 gallon casks, and an outside barbecue, despite the snow, was set up. The party was a great success, with impromptu songs by myself and a squaddie who played guitar, culminating in a drunken snowball fight, with the unfortunate Captain Howard, a tall, thin and amiable product of Sandhurst, on the receiving end of most of the missiles.

This was the least of the stoical Captain's worries however, as upon rising zombie-like from our beds the next day, we learnt that Bill, one of the drivers, had, while under the influence of alcohol, half-wrecked the Green Arrow bar, taken command of 'Mrs Windsor's Wagon' and crashed it into the Captain's car. He was later to be seen driving erratically down into the town at five in the morning, declaring his intent to go AWOL and intent on reaching the Austrian border. It was amusing to hear the Captain with his clipped, upper class accent, on the phone to the American MP's asking for advice on how to apprehend the miscreant: "Er, MP's office? This is Captain Howard, British Army at Kean's Lodge. One of my chaps has done a runner." Pause for reply. "A runner? er, that's to say he's gone AWOL. AWOL? that's absent without leave," his eyes rolled heavenward. Pause for reply again. "What do I want you to do?" His voice was rising. "Catch the bugger, that's what! Not only has he taken one of our lorries...what, lorries? er, I think you call it a truck, he's pranged my bloody car as well." Pause. "He's gone orf to bloody Austria". Pause. "No! not in my car, my car's been bloody pranged!" Pause. "PRANGED? It means bloody smashed - written orf!" At this point his voice was becoming hysterical, and I was compelled to leave the room, stifling my laughter until I reached the the snow-flaked verandah outside.

Before they left, the squaddies turned up at the gymnasium in the retrieved lorry, bearing gifts for me: cases of tinned 'compo' rations left over after their exercise, containing such fine examples of British fare as Stewed steak and Kidney pudding; Chicken Supreme; Chocolate, Ginger and fruit puddings; Coffee; Powdered milk; Sugar; and best of all, real English tea bags. Sheamus, whose idea of haute cuisine was scraping the mould off baked beans, on hearing of this, increased his visits to the Gym, eager to share my good fortune, saying too much stodgy food would be bad for my health.

It was now April. Except for the high slopes of the Zugspitze, the snow had disappeared and had been replaced by days of continuous rain. It was the end of the winter season, and as new people arrived, others were making plans to leave. Alan and Rough Mick were also planning to leave, and I found them one day in the Gym, poring over a huge map that spread over the desk. They were planning to go down to Tanzania. Mick's father lived there, and with the optimism of youth, thought they would 'pop in' to see him. Alan was really getting into the logistics of such a venture and was muttering to himself while looking at the map.

"How are you getting down there?" I asked casually. Mick looked

up from the map, with what I thought a look of desperation combined with resignation on his face.

"By bike," he said, with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

"Bike?" I echo'd.

"Across the Sahara Desert," he continued. I searched his face, fearing a wind-up.

"You're going across the Sahara Desert on bikes?"

"Well we are according to 'Rommel', here," said Mick, jerking a thumb at Alan, who was studying the map with great intensity.

The next time I got Mick on his own we had an earnest talk:

"Do you know how big the Sahara Desert is?" I asked.

"I know," said Mick, "but try telling Alan."

"It's over 3 million square miles - and, if you haven't noticed, it's made of sand."

"Oh yes, I've seen 'Laurence of Arabia.'"

"Laurence of Arabia at least had a camel."

"Oh God! don't mention camels to Al."

"Why?"

"Because he grabs the first idea that comes into his head, and I think I'd rather go by bike than bloody camel!"

He and Alan duly put in their notices to their respective employers, then spent a further week assembling their equipment and preparing their steeds. Ready for 'the trip of a lifetime,' as Alan put it. Sheamus toyed with the idea of joining them, even going so far as to have a cholera jab, but wisely chickened out in the end. "Well," I told him, "if cholera ever strikes Garmisch, you'll be the only survivor".

I saw nothing of the desert-bound duo until their day of their departure. I was walking down the long Zugspitz strasse leading from the barracks, when two bicycles bearing hunched over figures whizzed by me, legs whirling round like pistons, they then stopped outside the cycle shop further on down the street. Alan had gone in to purchase last-minute tools, while Mick was astride his bike and casting furtive glances up and down the street, he was red-faced, breathing heavily, and the first film of sweat had started to appear on his brow. I slowly appraised their readiness to tackle the onerous task before them. They had sleeping bags tied to the racks, rucksacks on their backs and old army canvas bags strapped precariously at either side of the back wheels of 10 speed, second-hand racing bikes. Both wore heavy-duty combat jackets, Jeans tucked into socks, and Army boots. I let sink into my mind the picture of them pedalling across the Sahara Desert on a trip that would have made Eddie Merckx blanch. Mick took in my searching and sceptical look. "I know," he said, "I'm already nacked and I've only travelled downhill 200 yards!" I started to giggle. Alan came out looking bright eyed and bushy tailed, shook my hand, said goodbye, mounted his bike and led off. With a mournful look to the heavens, Mick dutifully followed, his bike wobbling alarmingly and canvas bags rocking from side to side. I was still crying with laughter ten minutes later. A month or so after the duos' departure, Sheamus

received custody of Alan's bike, which had been sent back from Italy, and which he promptly sold. Ten years later, both on holiday in Garmisch, and not having seen each other in that time, Sheamus met Alan. The first words said by Alan to him was: "Where's the money for my bike?" And he was serious. It was one of the few times I've seen Sheamus lost for words.

1976 came to its end. Sheamus had gone back to Glasgow to embark on a course of higher education, and as the winter season approached again I was dismayed to find that the cost-cutting exercise underway in AFRC, had resulted in a reduction of the English bands in the hotels. I used to enjoy speaking to them because they were usually from the North of England, although the American audience would have all sorts of problems understanding the accents. The Sheffield drummer of a band for example, who would occasionally and purposely exaggerate his Yorkshire accent when introducing the next song. "Ere's a song bah summbody corled Elvis, dat wor also recorded by Grimethorpe Colliery Brass Band." The fact that the band were all black, made it all the more mystifying to the black-Americans in the audience who, having their own patois, were intrigued by this incomprehensible language and would purposely engage them in conversation just to hear them speak.

That year was in my opinion, the last year of the truly great times in Garmisch for the British worker. There were at the year's end only around fifteen Brits working for AFRC, which made us something of a family, that occasionally got together pining for English tea bags and 'chocolate digestives'. This was to change in later years as the jobs in Britain dried up and young people flocked to Garmisch like the early gold miners to California, new faces seeming to appear every week. I meanwhile, was exploring further afield. To Austria, or trips by car with an American friend, through the Brenner pass into the Italian, Sud Tyrol, where the German language and currency was traded almost as frequently as Italian. It was wonderful to be in a location where such countries could be visited with such ease, Austria being less than an hour's bike ride away.

Brits and Americans are generally reluctant to learn other languages or cultures further than the beginner stage, if at all; but the American military surpass them. It was not only that their radios were permanently tuned to AFN or an American Forces TV channel piped in from Munich, but also, all the facilities were in place to ensure that no-one need leave the security of their American enclave in order to purchase whatever article they desired. It reminded me of a sceptical description of America I had once read: 'A country that has evolved from barbarism to decadence with no intervening period of civilisation'. A cynical description I partly agreed with. The unfortunate result of this pandering, though, was a body of people, many of whom were unable to think for themselves, cocooned in their insularity, and regarded by the civilian workers - British, German and American alike, with a faint contempt. An attitude also arising

from the fact that the people in the armed forces invariably held a philosophy in direct conflict with that of the people who worked for them: On one hand you had the military, who fought to uphold all that was good and true in the American way of life. God, the American dream and mom's apple pie; and on the other, employees - mainly backpackers - who were, given the recent war record of the USA, travelling to escape such cant, and couldn't give a damn about such conservative values.

Having my sleeping quarters in the barracks was disgustingly cheap, and also placed me in close proximity to the other hotel used by the lower ranks, the Sheridan Plaza, which for me had only one redeeming feature, to supply me with cheap beer from the staff machine when stocks had run low. Beer, as you will be aware by now, has played no small part in my travels so far, and persons of a more abstemious nature would no doubt look askance at the many over-indulgences. It is however our conventional social lubricant and caster-off of inhibitions. How otherwise would seventy five per cent of the male population pluck up the courage to ask women for a dance or date? For serious beer drinkers, the 'Mecca' of beer drinking is Munich. It is steeped in the brewing tradition, as is the whole of Bavaria. The oldest brewery in the world is in Munich; the largest pub in the world is, or was, in Munich, and there are several monasteries that, during the middle ages, brewed beer strong enough to sustain them during the lenten period, this was known as 'flussiges brot' or liquid bread. Nowadays it is made less for survival than for profit, and causes your head to spin after two bottles. There was at one time, even a beer machine in the Garmisch hospital, where patients and their visitors could sit and sink a couple as though in their own homes. Along with friends, I have spent two hours in a ward getting slowly inebriated while ostensibly visiting someone with a broken leg. Bavarian building sites for example, do not have tea breaks: They start at 8am; have a beer break at 10am; work until 12 noon; retire to the nearest pub or break into the stack of beer crates outside their cabin; work until 3pm, then have another beer. The tedium of working life is thus ameliorated by these regular libations. They are not restricted by sanctimonious rules as in Britain and the U S A or even the north of Germany. This generous quaffing of beer is a tradition as much as the English tea break, and any attempt to curtail it would meet with stiff resistance and the Bavarians treat it as an indispensable part of their culture.

One German I knew, a huge beer-belly of a man, was reputed to drink 5-8 litres a day! Although drinking like that was rare, many did develop a problem, and were referred by their doctors to a clinic for the 'Kur', a euphemism for drying-out. That such a problem was common, was due in the main to the low price of beer in the supermarkets; the aforesaid tradition, and the availability of the beer in machines at each hotel. Spülers especially, by reason of their warm and mind-numbing occupation, were especially susceptible to the blandishments of the beer machines. At that time, 60 pfennigs could

obtain a refreshing restorative that helped make their occupation half-human. It was not unusual when spüling, to go through six or more bottles a shift, and not at the end of it know you had drunk at all, as the perspiration induced under the warm conditions nullified any effects of the alcohol on your system. All it did, was replace the fluid lost and promote a more genial outlook in which to work. This was accepted by hotel bosses on the continent far more than in Britain.

Although I had one of the best jobs at AFRC, it wasn't exactly stimulating. I had now been in Garmisch sixteen months, had seen almost everything, done many things and had saved quite a bit of money, and hearing young people talk of lazy days in Greece, my feet were becoming somewhat itchy. I had seen none of the places that the travellers that passed through Garmisch were telling me of, and I felt that it was time to explore again, and one day I finally told my colleague, George, that I would be leaving. George was the replacement for Alan as my colleague at the Gym. He was a Czech by birth, a naturalised Aussie, fifteen years older than me, and spoke at times with a pronounced stammer. One day as I was taking over from him, George said he was going over to see our boss, a Sergeant Evans. I asked him to ring back to let me know if Evans was in his office, meaning to go to speak to him about my notice. He rang me ten minutes later: "Pete, I've been knock, knock, knocking on Evans' door....." I interrupted him with my laughter, and every time I hear that Bob Dylan song now, I think of George, knock, knock, knocking...

CHAPTER SIX

In the spring of 77 I was heading for Corfu via Austria and Italy, finally realising a dream to visit Greece, and elected to travel by train. I think trains are the most civilised form of travel, in that they carry that air of refinement and comfort that is unmatched by road transport, and lack the rude, immediate haste of air travel. Waving goodbye to the friends gathered at the station to see me off, I felt that old tingle of excitement that had remained dormant during my sojourn in Garmisch, and was eagerly looking forward to soak up some sun before moving onto Spain and attempt to find work in Calella again before the season started. Furthermore, I was quite rich, having around £900 on my person in the form of dollars and marks, with the bulk in German DM travellers cheques, and was looking forward to spending some of it.

The train involved an overnight journey down the coast of Italy, sometimes so close to the sea that spray would spatter the outside of the carriages. It also had the annoying habit of stopping at every station, where nobody seemed to get off, with the result that the last stage of the journey culminated in a mass of sweaty, unsavoury bodies in cramped compartments. My last few hours were spent in the corridor holding an erratic conversation with an Italian boy, mainly in the few words of Spanish that I knew, along with a smattering of English and German thrown in. It did however provide a welcome diversion from my compartment, which I had left to the mercy of a garrulous Italian family of eight, complete with two wailing babies and nauseous smells that emanated from soiled nappies, garlic sausages and a particularly pungent cheese that, although wrapped in foil, was slowly baking in the heat of the sunlit carriage and seemed to be slowly oozing into my brain. So much for the refinement of the train!

It was around 10am next day, when I alighted with relief onto the Brindisi platform, where I was immediately accosted by a lad of about twelve years of age who greeted me with the words: "Eenglish, American, Doysch"?

"Chinese," I said, with a weary glance at his bright young face.

"Chinees?" He looked hard at me. I had to laugh, causing him to laugh too.

"English," I conceded.

"If you hungry, come," he said, "I take you to good place - cheap." I couldn't be bothered to argue, I was hungry and had plenty of time before my boat left, so allowed him to lead me out of the station where he beat off other importuning ragamuffins vying for my trade. He led me a few blocks to a narrow side street and into a small and rustic, but clean restaurant, my young companion heralding his arrival by shouting something in Italian with surprising vigour for such a small frame. A large, aproned man immediately crashed through beaded curtains, a culinary spirit evoked by the young man's cry. He appraised me instantly, and if he was disappointed at my solitary presence, he gave no sign of it, as with much bobbing of his head and

Uriah Heep-like wringing of hands, led me as if in the presence of royalty to the table of his choice in the empty room. Having took my order, he then burst through the curtain again to the kitchen while the young lad scurried out again. "Goodbye meester."

While enjoying the simple meal of Spaghetti, green salad and veal cutlet, the man would burst out from the beaded curtain every few minutes to enquire if I was satisfied, while plying me with questions and comments on his food, without allowing me the chance of reply: "The salaad eet ees good? The spaghetti ees excellent no? More beer, eh? My cousin ees in London, You go to Greece eh, very nice. How you call thees in Eenglees?" The meal was good, the only disappointment being the beer, which paled in comparison to the excellent Bavarian brews to which I had grown accustomed. I politely informed him of this. "Ah, you must 'av wine, I 'av gooood wine." He disappeared to return with a glass and a bottle of red wine, which he placed reverently on the table and hovered around me, fussing and clucking, occasionally singing snatches of Verdi. I had the impression that I was the first foreigner of the year. He was quite young, yet with a greasy rotundity that told of touristless winter days nibbling at titbits of food and endless sips of wine. Expansive, generous and clearly the owner, he was delighting in entertaining me, and after I had finished my veal, he joined me, poured out a glass of wine and chatted amiably of business, 'Eengland' and 'Eetalia'. When I was to depart, he let me keep the ½ bottle of wine that was left, "plees to av a drink for me." It was with a little regret that I had to leave his company to catch the boat.

The short voyage to Corfu was smooth and uneventful, and around 6pm the boat docked at the quayside. I had met up with two young Americans on the boat, sweethearts of no more than seventeen or eighteen years, who continually and nauseatingly held hands while gazing into each other's eyes. They had the clean-cut, fresh look of total innocents, with their new, expensive clothing. As I looked on, a hint of world-weariness seemed already to creep up on me.

They told me a place called Vatos, an apparently idyllic hamlet on the west side of the island, which had Spiro's taverna as the focal point. Having no firm plans, and finding the idea of a quiet hideaway appealing, I elected to go with them. An hour later I was beginning to wish I had stayed in Corfu Town. Though moonlit, the night had drawn in quickly and ominously, to the extent that we could hardly find the narrow path that was winding up the mountain side, the moon playing hide and seek behind the clouds, and then it started to rain. Not just a nice steady patter, but a full-blooded, thunder and lightning downpour of the stair-rod variety. The lances of rain tore at the surrounding countryside, and within minutes I was wet through. Romeo and Juliet of course had the latest in rain gear. It was however the time of year just after Easter, and prior to the start of the summer season in Greece, and thus had none of the chill one would have encountered just two or three weeks before, nevertheless, it was a

inauspicious start to my holiday.

Eventually we saw a glimmer of light; from where, came a welcoming mix of chatter, laughter and Stevie Wonder. Marching straight to the bar and dripping water, I asked for a much needed beer. The barman was slim and afro-haired. He asked for my sodden rucksack and placed it alongside others behind the bar. "Here's one to start you off, it'll warm you up," he spoke English with a American accent, and reaching for a small glass, filled it with Metaxa brandy from a huge Methuselah of a bottle, that had at its base a small brass spigot. I sipped at the fiery liquid, appreciating the young man's thoughtfulness and asked about sleeping arrangements. "You all sleep in the barn," he replied, "there's plenty of room." I then sat down next to two other English-speaking couples, I had more than enough of the two lovers, who had ordered coffee. I wished to be rid of them. Their naive, American college-kid charm was getting on my nerves, and indeed, after two days they evidently decided that Vatos didn't come up to their expectations and left.

The next day I walked around the immediate area. That the countryside was so green came somewhat of a surprise to me, though given the recent downpour, it shouldn't have. Vatos was a hamlet of tiny, scattered farms surrounded by olive groves, built on rocky, undulating terrain and thirty minutes walk from the nearest bit of sandy beach, which was accessible only by way of a narrow, precipitous path. The meandering pathway to the beach, through old and gnarled olive trees interspersed with cypress was a pleasure in itself, with the occasional greeting to Corfiot peasant women, displaying faces that matched the trees, who were either bearing billowing packages on their heads, or leading a laden, plodding and dispirited donkey, while avoiding the nets laid on the ground that encroached upon the paths to catch the plump, olives from the spreading branches.

The island bore at that time little of the construction that had affected Spain, and the immediate scenery must have been prevalent all over the island, when the Venetians - who had encouraged the planting of the trees - had been the ruling power, and had changed little until the previous few decades. Laurence Durrell had prefaced 'Prospero's Cell', an account of his life there in the 30s, with a quotation from an earlier visitor: 'A Greekish isle, and the most pleasant place that ever our eyes beheld for the exercise of a solitary and contemplative life...In our travels many times, falling into dangers and unpleasant places, this only island would be the place where we would wish ourselves to end our lives.' (Anthony Sherley 1601)

The days passed with a languor that pervaded every part of my being. Just to be away from the need to earn a living, invoked in me a realisation that life is not about silly little things like the desire for prestige or money; although we cannot in this modern world get far enough away to ignore such a basic requirement. Around my tenth

day, Mike had a word with me. "Pete, Spiro's a little worried that you haven't paid anything for eight days." This was a reference to the credit system that Spiro, the owner of the taverna had arranged if you were temporarily without funds; and as there was only one bus a day, it was convenient to run up a bill.

"Sure Mike no problem, I'll go tomorrow," I replied. I was amazed when he first told me I could get a tab. After all no-one knew me, and I could have been the biggest fraudster in the Mediterranean for all they knew. The next day I paid my bill: £30 for eight days of breakfasts, normally toast with Omelette, yoghurt and honey; eight main meals; many bottles of local wine; not a few brandies and ouzos; a few beers and many cups of coffee. Accomodation - albeit a barn - was free! No wonder it was a well-liked place! And because of its small size, is or was, unknown to tour operators, being known only by word of mouth. Indeed, it was only in 2008 that I saw it on the internet as a popular place to visit. That disappointed me, as I had hoped that there were still surviving, some such places that had remained free from the encumbrance of modern life.

Spiro -I think almost all first born sons in Corfu are called Spiro, oozed contentment from every pore, but it was only when one went into the old, adjacent taverna that you saw him. He was in his forties with an ample expanse of waist and the inevitable stubbled chin, content to wile away his time with his stubble-chinned friends in the dark and humble interior as they played with their worry beads - a completely superfluous accessory - over glasses of ouzo. One can imagine of someone who allows people to sleep free in his barn and gives credit to complete strangers for eight days, that Spiro was a very nice man. Although this trait was not shared by another taverna owner nearby, who, so we were informed by a policeman friend of Spiro, was in envy of his popularity, and had reported him for taking in sleeping guests without a licence, but several days passed and it was not until everyone had forgotten about it that anything happened:

Mike was in Corfu Town on business, and everyone else was either on the beach or doing other things, leaving me alone in the place. By now the weather had settled into continuously warm and sunny days, and all 'guests' were sleeping in the olive groves to the rear of the taverna, all our backpacks being stored in the barn, and I was about to take myself off to the cove, when Spiro called me over. He had in attendance his young daughter, Despina, a bright girl of some 12 years, who spoke good English and worked as waitress.

"Pit," she pronounced my name as it appeared on my bill. It seemed that just three characters in Greek were the nearest approximation to Pete. "My father, he want you help him with backpacks from barn, his friend in the police say that police come to look for people sleeping." So this was the tip-off we had been waiting for.

Spiro and I duly set to and cleared every backpack and sign of their presence from the barn, moving them into his uncle Hector's garden shed on the adjacent plot of land. Much flapping of wings and squawking

ensued, with errant chickens flying out from cosy corners as we piled the evidence into the shed and covered them with a tarpaulin. Then, in what turned out to be Spiro's master-stroke, he dragged the somewhat annoyed and temperamental goat away from his grazing, and stuffed him inside the shed. I stayed to see the visit:

Three policemen drew up in their jeep, all dressed in blue, rather Chaplinesque trousers, all wearing a growth of stubble and looking as if they had been dragged from some all night card game. Carrying torches they headed straight for the barn, Spiro trailed behind affecting an air of apparent nonchalance. Finding it empty they searched the olive grove and then inspected a small shed, nothing incriminating was to be found anywhere. Appearing to be satisfied they seemed about to leave, when one of them, a rotund Oliver Hardy look-alike, casually waddled over to the chicken shed, there being no fence between the two plots of land. Spiro followed. The policeman peered between the metal bars of the shed and flashed his torch at the goat who, interrupted from his lunch, was in no mood to take blinding lights and began to butt the wooden slats. The policeman suddenly displayed an alacrity I thought him incapable of as he jumped smartly back. Spiro said something to the policeman and they both walked away, chuckling, leaving the hiding place concealing some twenty bundles. The police seemed to be apologising profusely as they took their leave, Spiro accepting them with an air of injured pride and shrugs of his shoulders, seeing them down the road and giving them a cheery wave, before turning to give me a crafty smile.

Our little community had a host of celebrities of a sort. A millionaire from South Africa being one of them, who I gathered, owned a construction firm. He was a large, I hesitate to say the word gentleman, as he was one of the breed of nouveau-riche who, lacking the all-round education and refinement of the truly aristocratic rich, attempt to elevate themselves to that position by bluster and arrogance, leaving them devoid of any charm that may have otherwise redeemed them. He was condescending and arrogant, and I disliked him intensely. Then there was Don. Originally from London, he had also arrived from South Africa with his pretty English wife, Kate, and their two children. They were on route to England, feeling that the troubles at that time warranted such a move. A journalist and actor, he had worked on a children's show with South African radio, but the most interesting thing for me however, was that he was the stepson of former British boxing champion, Freddie Mills. I did ask him once what happened to cause the great, former boxer's untimely and still mysterious death, to which he replied only that, "he was killed." We were also paid a visit from a quite well known, middle-aged, English publisher and overt homosexual, along with his young, raven-haired boyfriend as his catamite. He would make advances to various young men, inviting them to swim in his pool at the villa he had rented. "I would ask you", he said to me, apologetically, "but I don't like beards." I had been thinking of shaving off my beard until that comment caused me to stick with it a while longer.

All good things must come to an end, and after six weeks on that enchanting isle it was time to leave if I was to get to Calella by the start of the season. On my final day I picked up my long-forgotten backpack and went into the taverna to catch Spiro before he took his daily snooze. I wanted to say goodbye and buy some soft drinks for the journey. He didn't speak, expressing his sadness at my departure purely by the use of his arms and a sympathetic facial expression, which then brightened as he grabbed an empty coke bottle, filled it with ouzo from a large bottle and whittled an over-large cork into shape with a penknife, before ramming it into the bottle with the flat of his hand, presenting me with it, smiling and pumping my hand in farewell. I placed the bottle into one of the zippered compartments in my backpack and walked out, while sadly looking around me for the last time and vowing to return. I haven't managed it yet, but still hope I shall.

The crossing from Corfu, and the long train journey up to Milan and then to Lyon train station in France went without without mishap, but it was from there that things began to go awry. Noting the destination plate Port Bou, affixed to the side of my Spanish-bound train I climbed aboard, plodded down the corridor and finding a compartment with just two occupants, took a position by the window and settled myself down into the seat ready for the long journey, but it was some two hours and three stops later, unable as usual to get to sleep whilst sat upright and in motion, that I was driven to attempt a little deception:

Slinging on my backpack I made my way back along the train towards the couchette section, thinking it unlikely that all of the bunk-beds would be occupied or reserved. Unfortunately, being late at night, this meant sliding back doors as quietly as possible in order to ascertain whether there were any bunks free. I guessed that the first compartment was full, as I could hear four distinct snores, almost in barber-shop quartet harmony. The second one I wasn't too sure about, but an angry voice fired off a question in rapid French and I quickly closed the door. I was about to investigate the third, when a shout from the end of the passage rooted me to the spot. It was the conductor. He strode determinedly up to me, chest stuck out, looking every inch the petty official as he eyed me coldly. He asked me for my couchette ticket, whereupon I showed him I had no such item by a shrug and a "Je suis Anglais." This raised his ire even more, as he rattled off a volley of Gallic invective and hustled me from the sleeping section; not back to where I had come from however, but further to the rear of the train. Now I was looking for the compartment I had left but now they all seemed full, and had their blinds drawn down. I decided to roam up and down and take the first vacant seat I found, but was condemned to repeat the performance of sliding doors open and peering into the gloom at the dozing passengers, before the gloomy light from the corridor reluctantly revealed a compartment with a seat near the far window.

I wish then I had been drunk or stoned, as in these states one is never embarrassed, and is oblivious to what people say or do, but alas I wasn't, and thus had to suffer the tut-tutting of elderly voices as I stumbled over legs and baskets, and then half-fell, putting my hand out on what I thought in the almost pitch black interior, was an expanse of vacant black seat, which turned out to be a black cat, which screeched alarmingly and flew off into the darkness, invoking many 'Sacre Bleu's,' or whatever the French use when some perceived nutter invades their compartment at lam waking them up, half-killing the cat, and throwing the whole compartment into confusion. After I had perdenez-moi'd myself to the vacant corner seat, and after throwing my backpack onto the rack, I sank ignominiously into my seat, feeling the hate of their eyes burning into me. Putting it from my mind I closed my eyes and finally managed a fitful sleep, during which time I remember the train stopping for about half an hour and then continuing, but in the other direction, a matter to which I gave scant attention at the time.

Awakening with stiff legs and neck, I hoped that I could sneak out before the other occupants awoke, but on looking around me I could see in the faint morning light which struggled to peep around the blinds, that at least two of the occupants opposite - both nuns - were wide awake. The older one eyed me balefully, while the other, who was young and rather attractive, looked at me with interest. I made a wan sort of smile at her, she smiled back, a radiant young smile that seemed to lighten even the severe black habit she wore. It lifted me somewhat, until turning to the left of me I beheld two of the other three occupants, two old, grey-haired women with a young girl of eight or nine years who was curled up fast asleep. They were watching me with sleepy, red, accusing eyes. Next to the old nun was a wicker basket, containing I think the cat, as it was nowhere to be seen. Closing my eyes again I tried in vain to go back to sleep, but this was impossible. I could see behind the window blind, held down by the thin rods enclosed within its fabric, that we were passing some countryside. The better to see, I lifted my hand lazily to unhook a rod from its groove, with a clatter, the blind shot upwards out of my grasp, the tension of the strong spring above dragging the other end of the slim rod on the other side screechingly in its wake. I was startled and instantly, fully awake. I looked round at the other occupants. The young girl was instantly aroused from her sleep, the two old women were holding their hearts and I suspect were both close to coronary seizures, the old nun wore an exasperated expression, while the cat was miaowing furiously in its box. Laying back my head I closed my eyes, trying to feign nonchalance, while wishing that some giant hand would pluck me away from my embarrassment. Eventually I dared to open my eyes and looked at the young nun opposite. She had her head in her hands, and appeared to be in the grip of some malady, as her body was making slight and spasmodic convulsions. I stared at her for some seconds, as did the whole compartment, even the cat had ceased its miaowing. After some seconds, and with a sudden huge inhalation of breath she took her hands away, then turning to the older

nun, murmured something, then rose and hurried out of the compartment closing the door behind her. I then heard what sounded like a short release of pent-up laughter.

Ten minutes later I also made my escape into the corridor, taking an hour to first go to the toilet, then to the end of the carriages as far as the engine, glancing at the morning scenery and into the various compartments. I returned somewhat reluctantly some minutes later to stand outside the compartment, musing on the unusual amount of nuns on board - I had counted at least twelve - and was just contemplating taking a walk to the tail end of the train, when I heard the conductor from some distance away demanding to see tickets. Re-entering the compartment and purposely avoiding the eyes of my travelling companions, I reached into my backpack's side pocket for my slim, leather passport and document holder, extricated the ticket and waited. With all the pomposity that such minor officials adopt when given a position entailing even the tiniest amount of power, the conductor made his entrance. It was the same one who had ushered me from the couchette section, and who I held responsible for the consequent incidents. I hated him! That the incidents would never had happened had I not been so greedy to obtain something for nothing, never entered my head at the time. I was the last to give him my ticket and was waiting for its return when, after giving my ticket more scrutiny than I considered normal, he suddenly flung out his hands in a dramatic fashion and cried, with I thought a note of triumph in his voice, "Port Bou, Port Bou," along with a rattle of French that contained the place name, Lourdes.

Suddenly, his words, the reversal of the train during the night, and the surprising number of nuns aboard, all made sense. Like the parts of a jig-saw fitting together I realized what had happened. The train had divided during the night! And while the section I had left had gone on to Port Bou, I was bound for Lourdes! I half expected the rest of the compartment to applaud. The bane of their journey had got his come-uppance, a just reward for his blunderings, but it was not so. They seemed to share in my embarrassment, especially the young nun, who looked at me with sympathy as I ignominiously signed German travellers cheques to pay for a destination I didn't want to reach, and was well out of my way to boot. My first impulse was to punch the conductor on the nose before pulling his neck off. Ah well, I thought, I'll just put it down to experience. A much stated traveller's aphorism which I was to repeat often over the years. Never was I so glad to get off a train, well, not since the train journey to Brindisi. I walked out of the station and into the pouring rain, not without again entertaining the malicious thought of finding the conductor to give him a cuff round the ear, a fit of pique from which I sensibly refrained.

Lourdes is a world famous Marian shrine and attracts millions of people each year to its famous grotto, and being a Catholic I knew quite a bit about it, but had no desire to attend any of its ceremonies,

turned off by the tacky, commercial element that has grown amongst what was once just a small, rural community in the Pyrenees. I ascertained that the quickest way to Calella would be of course over the Pyrenees via the village of Pau, onto Zaragoza then onto Barcelona, and feeling a need to get away as soon as possible, I caught the next train. Alas, retribution for my irreligious haste to leave Lourdes followed swiftly, for I caught the wrong train, luckily, realising it before I had travelled too far and immediately catching a train back, without having to fork out yet more money to get nowhere. It was still pouring with rain as I decided to quit my aimless ramblings in order to recharge myself and checked into a hotel, where after a much needed sleep I arose to a beautifully warm and clear day.

By means of a halting conversation in English with the hotelier I determined the correct route was to board a train for Pau, from there I had to make a connection. This was achieved with the minimum of fuss, and while rattling along on the train uncertain of my next stop, and also determined not to commit another faux pas, I stood up in the carriage and asked if anyone spoke English. Thankfully, a woman seated close by spoke it fluently, she told me the exact station and that from there I should then catch a bus over the Pyrenees to a station in the mountains, from where I could get a train to Zaragoza.

It was hot now, and the sun shone through the windows of the old bus as it rattled and shook its way up the mountain side. I was seated next to the aisle and alongside a large gentleman with a bald head, my backpack lay above him on the rack. I closed my eyes and was thinking of Vatos and the friendly people I had met, the lovely, lush countryside; the laughs over the wine and the ouzo. Ah! I could almost smell it. I suddenly opened my eyes. I *could* smell it! The unmistakable smell of aniseed. I looked to my right, the baldheaded man had his head back and was snoring quietly. Plop! A drop of liquid, clear and thick, landed on his head. I looked up at my backpack, the wet stain on the zippered compartment told its tale. The coke bottle of ouzo given to me by Spiro on my departure had chosen this moment to seep through its rough-hewn cork and was slowly anointing my neighbour with its contents, like some Greek version of the Chinese water torture. I suppressed my initial panic and looked casually around the bus. Spying an empty seat, I rose stealthily, plucked my backpack from above in one swift movement and moved to occupy it. Ignoring the strange looks of the other passengers at my sudden furtive movements, I then withdrew the offending bottle which was now only half-full, and assisted in the demise of its contents. By the time we had reached the the other side of the border I felt much more relaxed.

The little railway station had a decaying, Ruritanian air about it, yet must have been used enough to warrant its continuing existence. It had probably changed little since it had been built, and caused me to think of a poverty-ridden Spain during their civil war some 40 years previously. Now it seemed conspicuously absent of officialdom,

except for an ancient, whiskery and baggy-panted porter wearing a tattered beret, who was performing facial gymnastics attempting to keep hold of stub of a cigarette that poked from the corner of his mouth. He puffed and wheezed his way along the platform wheeling a porter's cart laden with several boxes and a suitcase, finally disgorging the contents into a small, brown shed. Half an hour later he re-appeared, sat down on a wooden bench, looked at an old fob-watch and took off his ancient beret, replacing it with a blue peaked hat, then lit up another cigarette before entering the small ticket office to fulfil his other role. The whole scenario reminded me of an old, Will Hay film. By means of a spartan train with wooden seats, I reached Zaragoza two hours later, transferring to a Barcelona bound train I spent the night gratefully in a pension by the station, before heading for Calella by the earliest morning train, glad to be easing back into a more familiar and less frenetic stage of my travels.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I looked at the vomit that lay splattered on the tiled floor in the ladies toilet and baking in the heat like an exotic omelette. A tequila sunrise kind of vomit I thought to myself. As an ancient Roman seer would divine chicken entrails, I mused on the liquor that had induced this inversion of Newton's law of gravity: what goes down will come up. I thought then of the pure and cool mountain air of Garmisch and how I would like to be there right now, surely the world held more for me than to be swabbing up people's self indulgence. But I was only wallowing in self pity, and after the first shallow-breathing minutes and trying not to concentrate on my work, I resumed my pub-cleaning routine.

It was June 78, my second year working in Calella, and a whole year since my desperate trip from Corfu to France, Lourdes and the Pyrenees. The previous year had worked out a dream, obtaining work in my favourite pub and being part of the Spanish Costa brigade had enlightened me ever more to its carefree delights, and thanks to my sojourn in Garmisch and further study during the winter months spent in England, I could speak not only sufficient German and Spanish to engage in basic conversation should the need arise, but had more the air of a seasoned traveller, which brought with it a corresponding confidence.

It was a special delight to walk in the 'Nags' for the first time at the start of a new season, and especially to see Math, Dave, Gary and other old friends that had returned, while Pluto was sat in the corner and still, 3 years since I had first arrived, absorbed in the Glass Key. I was fortunate that Math had, after business had picked up a little, employed me to work in the 'Nags' again, and despite minor discomforts like cleaning the remnants of disgorged stomachs off toilet floors, I was content. The Nag's Head held a special attraction for people, probably by an ethos of complete honesty and trust, in that Math never bothered with a till or register of any kind, having only a drawer set into what may once have been an old dressing table, above which, bottle racks complete with optics that dispensed the poor Spanish imitations of popular spirits were attached. The better liquors were only dispensed to a few discerning customers, which included locals, workers and anyone who had the sense not to drink the inferior Spanish equivalents. These were perched on adjacent shelves and known as 'top shelf' liquor.

Math was a fine man in many respects, but extraordinarily complacent about certain things in the pub, but I suppose this added to the charm. The 'sound system' was supplied by a twin turntable that must have been one of the prototypes, with a 78 speed setting! I often marvelled how the thing managed to keep on working. Had it broken down we would have found it impossible to get parts for it. I once joked with him that they stopped making valves a long time ago, and told him that they have transistors now.

"Good for another ten years," he replied in mock wisdom.

In the garden bar, trails of wire meandered along the ground and wound their way around the plants and rocks, their function to supply electricity to the coloured lights that dangled from the orange tree and the walls. These would be twisted to make connections and all held tenuously together with perished and peeling plastic tape, within easy reach of any stray hand and all open to the elements, while on the infrequent rainy days, the leaks from the front bar roof would necessitate the positioning of several receptacles to catch the drips. Had the 'Nags' been in England it would never have received a license.

To most tourists it was just a place to drink, another pub, a convenient watering hole twixt the beach and their hotel, a British haven in a sea of foreign perplexity, and to some of them, all foreigners were rude and unwilling to give them the home comforts they demanded. I usually coped with any insularity, especially if they tipped well. They generally complained of the hotel food, and were wont to eat hamburgers and chips and other fast-food garbage, little knowing of the delights that Spanish cuisine had to offer - and cheap too. The Spanish restaurants by law, have or had, to display a 'menu del dia' for workers. At one bar, five hundred pesetas could get you a five course meal with wine and bread. The servings were more than ample, and known to workers as a 'belly buster'. As a German friend of mine used to say: "Calella is the cheapest place and so we get only the cheapest people," and it was fairly true to say that the British often lacked the sophistication of even these tourist dregs of Europe. I never did tell him that his British colleagues referred to the Dutch as 'cloggies' and the Germans as 'Tank Drivers'!

Along with my fellow barman, Mick, I would often compare the beautifully outfitted Dutch, Danish or German girls who would sit down at the table and wait patiently for one of us to wait on them, to the British Sharons and Tracys, who flounced in dressed in their low cut summer prints, and would all tend to line up at the bar, often ordering individual drinks. For fun we would sometimes assume their dialect, although in certain cases it would prove to be a little risky.

Sharon: "half a lager"(scouse accent).

Me:(scouse accent)"half a lager?"

"Are you from Liverpool?"

"No."

"Well, why are yer talking like us then?"

"I can talk how I like, can't I?"(scouse accent again).

Sharon to Tracy: "Hey Trace, he's taking the frigging piss out of us."

I have often wondered if German, Dutch or Danish women employ the same coarseness in their native tongue as some of our fair maidens?

While on the subject of fair maidens. Two Liverpool girls worked on the street working as 'public relations' personnell, to use the term

at its loosest, for a British bar The Apples and Pears, and situated lower down the street, for whom they handed out printed cards and books of matches. This touting of customers was known as propaganda, or 'propping', which in our patch, involved two British pubs and the Highwayman discoteque. A Dutch lad, Peter, together with a Spaniard, Jose, and Hans, a German, would all 'prop' for the disco, while I would hand out cards for the 'Nags' for a few hours prior to going in to the bar to work.

We would congregate at the intersection of two streets between the 'Nags' and the 'Apples', each handing out our respective cards while keeping an eye out for the police who, cognisant of these illegal activities nevertheless ignored it, unless it was done under their noses. The two 'scouse' girls Dot and Jane, were always good for a laugh and completely unnerved about their situation in an alien environment, acted as though in Upper Parliament street. Dot was a bleached-blonde and stood about five feet tall in high heels, carrying as part of her propping aids an enormous straw shopping bag full of books of matches, these were printed with the Apples and Pears pub logo with a small map printed on the reverse. Jane on the other hand was about five feet ten, wore high heels that brought her up to six feet, and a pencil skirt that hugged at her thighs and knees, causing her to walk, in Dot's words, "like a pregnant, friggin' duck." She had a head of reddish, tight and curly hair, flat on top, and possessed the most amazing, braying laugh, like a donkey on laughing gas. They would normally stand back-to-back, handing out their respective give-aways to all and sundry, and although it was normal when propping to use the horses-for-courses approach, for example, if one heard older people speaking German, one knew it would be a waste of time and a card to give them anything that advertised a British pub. This selectivity never bothered Dot and Jane however, and interspersed with their handing out of cards and matches would be such linguistic gems as: "get yer arses down the Apples and Pears - best pub in Calella." These delightful phrases were delivered in a hard scouse accent, causing geriatric Germans and doddering Dutch to scratch their heads, trying to figure out what was said to them.

One evening we were all propping away, when Peter came over and said: "the police are coming, let's leave Dot and Jane and see what happens". Due to their interminable chat, it would be always one of us men that would see the police first and then warn the girls, with the result that they relied on us completely. So, while Jose, Hans and Peter sneaked one way away from the centre of the intersection, I did the same on the other side of the street, mingling with the window-shoppers. It was quite busy with plenty of tourists thronging the streets, but even so it was not hard to spot the blue uniforms of the two policemen, especially if you were looking for them.

The two girls meanwhile, were in fine form, and must have been well fuelled - free drinks being one of the perks of the job - and were flirting with some young Dutch lads. I could hear Jane's braying laugh

cutting through the street noise. The two policemen got within five yards. Dot was merrily handing out the matches willy-nilly, and delving once again into the depths of her bag extricated a tiny fistful of matchbooks, she then looked up while automatically extending her arm and was on the point of handing them to... the police! She stood stock still, with a look of amazed shock on her small face, the only movement being two enormous, dangling, plastic ear-rings which were vibrating with the spasms her jaw was making as she tried to utter something. Finally, she backed off two paces and half turned.

"Jane... it, it's the police," she croaked. Jane whipped around, saw the policemen and screamed. Then letting out a loud "friggin hell," set off as fast as her high heels and pencil skirt could take her. Dot took off after her, stumbling in her high heels, dropping the basket and disgorging most of its contents. Stopping to pick them up, she then gave a backward glance at the policemen, and with a "frigging ell fire," tottered after the now shoeless Jane who, halfway to the safety of the 'Apples' gave out her loud braying laugh. I was almost crying with laughter, as was Peter, Hans, Jose - and the two policemen!

Shortly after this incident they were stationed in their usual place, and 'propped' two young Americans who were on a trip through Spain in a hired car. They must have made an impression on the two Yanks, because they got a date with them, causing the lads to stay in Calella longer than planned, and I heard subsequent reports of their sexual escapades in the girls' flat, their boozy afternoons in the Rabbie Burns pub and riotous nights spent in the 'Apples' and later, at one of the several 'Disco's. The Americans took their leave five days later in the Rabbie Burns pub. They looked much the worse for wear. On arrival they were bright-eyed, clean-cut and bashful American college kids. Now, they had bloodshot eyes, beer-stained trousers, and were swearing in a scouse accent. As they climbed into their car, one of the lads drawled: "well, I'd like to thank you ladies for giving us a good time." Jane gave Dot a hefty nudge with her elbow sending little Dot off balance, "Yer ere that Dot," she said, "he called us ladies."

I was working illegally, as were most of the British, this meant that one had to be extra careful about being caught 'propping' or working in the bar, but the local police paid little attention. It was only when an occasional edict would come from Government, prompted by the unions, that purges would emerge. It was normal to 'prop' the beach in the afternoons, trudging the coarse, baking sand and weaving among the diversely shaped and slowly frying skins giving off various odours of sun lotion, while blithely handing out cards or depositing them on sunbaked midriffs as they snoozed. This resulted in leisurely sunbathers retiring from the beach with a handful of them from four or five different pubs or disco's. Ok for tacky, free souvenirs I suppose

This beach 'prop' was however suspended on Sundays, when the Spanish

locals, many from Barcelona and not a few of them important council dignitaries or police chiefs, would descend on Calella for the day. This was the only day in the week when we were thankfully spared the wearying task of plodding in the hot sun attempting to drum up custom. Apart from this Sunday observance, 'propping' was indiscriminate, only one pice of etiquette had to be observed, and that was the unwritten rule that no-one 'prop' for their own concern in another pub.

'Propping' apart, there was little that one could complain of. The apartments were adequate to good. That there was no mains gas - everything is geared to bottles of the calor variety - was no problem, if you had forgotten to order the gas it was cheap enough to eat out, while the heat was something one got accustomed to, but with the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol and late nights carousing with the opposite sex, it was a lifestyle undertaken only by the young.

Calella was in certain respects like Garmisch without the beauty and the officialdom, and exactly what I had set out to find three years earlier, you did however have to work seven days a week, but when one is young and fit it is a small price to pay. It was rare that one met an obnoxious person who worked in Calella, apart from the occasional poser, which to us Brits, meant anyone who ironed their shirts or washed their jeans more than once a week. The acquisition of a tan was looked on with deep suspicion, and as far as the majority of the British workers were concerned the beach was a no-go area, and if anyone did get above their station, it was soon knocked out of them by the 'slag machine.' This was an open and unashamed 'slagging' of the offending person in public, resulting in either the embarrassed victim moving on or conforming to the common herd. To raise anything more problematical than the venue for somebody's birthday celebration would be to invite scorn, and affairs of the outside world - apart from football - were never dwelled on for too long, except perhaps by the more intellectual of workers or 'superstars' as opposed to the 'lepers', who tended to work for the rowdier bars. It was rare that anyone was that interested in the outside world sufficiently to buy a newspaper, relying on those left by tourists, but these were generally the banal tabloids that never caused one to think more than a nano-second about anything. I chanced to be be sat in the 'Nags' one day alongside Pluto and reading a rare two day old copy of the 'Observer'. He looked up from the 'Glass Key' for a brief second or two.

"Anything interesting?" he enquired.

"Dow Jones" has fallen," I replied with mock gravity.

"Who's fallen"? said the ignorant Pluto.

"Dow Jones," I repeated. Pluto thought for a moment.

"Is ee that Welsh rugby player?"

The previous year I had worked a month in a bar called 'The Farmer's Arms' with Algy, an extremely funny, Stockport lad, who weighed in at about 17 stones. After we had cleaned the bar, refilled the bottles from the large carboys of cheap and nasty spirits - now outlawed -

and consumed a few 'liveners', we would meander down to the workers' debating room, the front bar of the Rabbie Burns. This was a forum used mainly by lepers, but sometimes superstars were tolerated. Here in a babble of dialects, and to a background of subdued pop music and clicking pool balls, the latest gossip would be given its first airing. On one of my first visits in the 'Rabbie', I was to learn of the sexual proclivities concerning a pretty young girl from Luton. These were minutely examined and commented upon, all vestige of proprietary being cast to one side under the revelations of her lovers, the whole Kama Sutra of events held up like a juicy bone to slavering dogs. Some may think that such kiss and tell tales are not unusual as men *do* tend to talk of their sexual conquests, but when the girl herself is sat at the same table it would normally behove people to be less candid. This was not Britain though, and normal codes of behaviour were suspended, and indeed, far from wishing for the ground to swallow her up, she seemed to enjoy it. In fact I was more embarrassed than her. That first introduction to the 'slag machine' helped to condition me to the many spicy, tourist tales I was to hear in future years; although it is hardly suprising that there was such lack of respect for female sensitivities, as many women on holiday seem to abandon all normal sexual propriety as soon as they have unpacked. I have observed quite a few middle-aged and outwardly respectable women make sheeps eyes at any male from seventeen year old upward, who happened to give them a second glance.

Often, when workers-to-be arrived early in the season, and not able to pay the down-payment on an apartment or find a doss, they would borrow a tent and stay for a while in the campground situated on the other side of the busy Barcelona road. It was cheap and provided a short term solution to sleeping arrangements until hopes of work turned into reality. Earlier that year, my friend Martin and I had borrowed a tent from Math and attempted to make the best of it. The tent was practically unused during the daytime. We would arrive back in the early mornings, after long drinking sessions, and flop down until the scorching Spanish sun rose and rendered the unshaded tent unbearable, containing as it did a tub of rancid butter, bacon, flakes of bread, spilt wine and unwashed clothing. Our neighbours were respectable Spanish people from Barcelona, who had the latest in tents and camping aids and viewed us with disdain. This was especially true of the family opposite, who had a pet monkey called Micky, a malevolent animal that was chained to their tent and seemed to have no other purpose in life other than to scream wildly at other campers and cause general mayhem. Many Spaniards have unfortunately a side of their nature that I abhor, and that is their indifference to animals bordering on cruelty. It was while observing the animal being chastised yet again by the surly owner with another cuff around the head, that I thought back to another of those London Cup Final weekends we used to have with our local club:

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It was Sunday morning after the Cup Final, and all club members were dressing to go out to visit Petticoat Lane, that famous part of London that held the flea market. Jimmy, an old and grizzled miner had never been before, and was receiving advice from a mate on how to conduct himself should any of the spivs attempt to foist one of the tiny marmoset monkeys onto his person: "they'll whip your wallet before you know it," said one veteran of many London campaigns, sagely. When at the famous market one hour later, Jimmy was casually browsing and gazing around with nothing further on his mind than wondering when the pubs would open, when suddenly a brightly dressed street trader carrying an equally vividly attired marmoset, threw the monkey at Jimmy with a cheerful cry of greeting. Jimmy, perceiving the flying animal in mid flight, felled it with a right hook. "That'll teach yer to go pinching bloody pockets," he said to the supine ape.

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It was with considerable glee then, that one day we observed Micky had got loose from his chain and was capering on top of their large tent, while the family below was preparing to dine, a large and bounteous spread laid out on the table. Despite all entreaties to come down from his perch, Mickey remained unmoved, being exultant and jabbering wildly in his new-found freedom. Obviously deciding they would attempt its retrieval after lunch, the family sat down. Father offered thanks for the bounty they were about to devour, when Micky decided to make an offering of his own and sent a stream of urine down on the unsuspecting diners. Cries of "Mickee, Mickee," were joined by helpless laughter from within our tent.

Shortly after came a chance for us to venture into what was for Calella, and indeed most of Spain that was struggling to rid itself of the Franco regime, unknown territory, in the form of a newly opened sex bar 'The Bolo Club'. It was a very large building that had years before been a venue for all types of artists that were prevalent in the working men's clubs and pubs of England, but had folded due to the sudden taste of clientele being diverted into other forms of entertainment, such as barbecue evenings and mock bullfights. It was partly owned by a Portugese man, Alfredo, an unsmiling man, who nevertheless was honest and trustworthy, which is more than could be said for his perpetually drunken co-owner Carlos, a grinning, stubble-faced bufoon, who hired me and Martin without a qualm at the grand rate of 300 pesetas a day plus free drinks. "Boys," he said. "We want thees to be best sex club in Spain. We are aving the best girls from Parees and Madreed, you must to get people in to see us."

I had doubts about this optimism from the start, and soon realized the girls had come from no farther than Barcelona, but was prepared to go along with it for the 'crack'. My pessimism was confirmed when I read the A-4 size leaflets he gave us to hand out on the beach. They were printed in English, German, Dutch and Danish. The English version started with the headlines 'SEXY SEXY SEXY: BEATIFUL GRILS FORM PARIS'. I could only hazard a guess as to how the German, Dutch and

Danish sections were mis-spelt. After a week or so we knew that we were not fulfilling all that Carlos required of us but cared little, it was a pain dishing out the oversize leaflets every day to unwilling tourists, and so stuffed a good supply of them in the toilets of the various beach-bars we frequented, whilst taking refuge from the burning sun and slaking our thirsts at the same time

I have to admire the optimism of some of the people who I have seen over the years, trying commercial ventures in Spain that one knows are doomed to failure from the start. Such a venture was the Bolo club. If I had to pick a place on the coast of Spain where not to start a sex club, Calella would be top of the list. In the first place it was the cheapest place in Spain to go for a holiday, thus attracting, as my German friend would always remark, the cheapest people, and hardly the place where one would expect tourists to pay a 500 pesetas admission fee and then to pay 100 pesetas a beer - not cheap at that time - and secondly, one had to cross the hazardous Barcelona road to get to it.

But for all that it didn't appear to be a bad show. It was true the girls didn't strip, they just sang and pranced about in scanty costumes, while there was also a comedian, supposedly from Cuba; though what kind of material a Cuban comedian could muster is anyone's guess. After the first week we had accumulated the grand total of twenty five customers, and the head waiter spoke to Martin and I in a worried tone.

"Ah Peter, why you no bring more people in?"

"We can't fuckin' drag em in," interjected Martin vehemently. Already tired of this kind of work, and surfeit with alcohol, he replied for me with true Yorkshire feeling. I shrugged my shoulders in stark agreement and we proceeded to the bar for our quota of free drinks. It was not only difficult to get tourists to attend our sexy soirees, we ourselves often found it difficult to enter the club. The problem being that every night there was a different doorman! We would go in every night ostensibly for our fresh supplies of leaflets, to be greeted by a bored and truculent figure in a claustrophobic booth, who would call us back and demand money, where Martin, again under the influence of alcohol, would then start to berate him in Anglo-Saxon, while I would explain in by now, well rehearsed Spanish, that we were employed by the establishment.

After two weeks things were getting desperate. We would turn up at nights for our leaflets and free drinks, to be greeted by a morose head waiter who, so tired of having nothing to do would insist we sat down while he waited on us. The lack of custom was accentuated by the dimensions of the building. It was a cathedral of a place. A five-a-side football match could have taken place without causing undue disturbance. Then one night 'Drunken Carlos' drew us aside and into his inner sanctum, a small room at the side of the bar and laden on one side with brown, cardboard boxes.

"Boys," he whispered, "I have plan. When you say to people to

come to ere," here he reached into one of the boxes, and with a flourish brought out a rectangular carton of shining cellophane. I looked at the carton, then looked at Martin, who had the same look of disbelief. No! He can't mean! Continued Carlos: "you geev him thees." That was the end of our flirtation with the Bolo Club. How could one be expected to entice lusty males in to see a sex show by offering him currant cakes?

Apart from Math, the only other pub-owner that I had much conversation with was Eddie. A Londoner, former printer and photographer, he was in his late thirties, slim, apart from a small beer-gut, with thinning hair and a marvellously infectious laugh. The most miserable of folk on hearing Eddie's laugh would laugh with him, and the more beer he drank the more he laughed. Eddie's pub gloried in the Spanish title of 'El Retorno del Caminante', or to give it its English translation, 'The Rover's Return'. Eddie was a guarantee of a laugh, which was why his bar was so popular, although he had an unusual way of attracting customers, and one with which persons with less personality would never have got away with, he would simply insult them! Though not maliciously, and not everybody. He said he hit on the idea when, having again imbibed more than usual - even for Eddie - he was suddenly in his own words, "pissed off with the poxy people," and at ten-o clock turned the music off and announced to the noisy crowd of customers, "drink up and piss off!" Unfortunately, as he reinforced this directive with a pointed finger towards the entrance, he skidded on a stray slice of lemon which caused him to clutch at the bar for support. The comical effect of this was to cause the pub to rock with laughter, and Eddie, knowing he had relinquished all authority, started to laugh with them.

"Ever since then," he said, in his cockney accent, "I throw in a bit of a slag to em - they fackin lav it." I have been at the bar when one of his minor 'slag imps' surfaced. It was before I was due to start work and when there was only myself and a young tourist, who had just wandered into the bar. It was very much like a Monty Python, script in a Fawltly Towers sketch:

Young lad: "Bottle of Estrella please."

Eddie: "Piss off."

Young lad:(taken aback) "what?"

Eddie: "Piss off."

Young lad: (Looking at me for support, I pretending not to notice).

"Well I'll go somewhere else then."

Eddie: "No you won't, you pillock." A pregnant pause followed, then Eddie bust out laughing, while pointing to the bemused customer and saying to me, "look at his fackin' boat race". Amazingly, this Pythonesque repartee guaranteed that the young lad would be guaranteed to come back, bringing with him his mates to spend the whole two weeks of his holiday drinking there. Just to see the crazy, slagging landlord with the wonderful laugh.

Eddie would regularly go on one of his non-drinking spells, where he

would swear off the drink and/or his roll-up cigarettes every month or so, proclaiming it was no good for his heart - he had a 'thing' about that particular organ - none of these acts of abstention ever lasting more than a few days before he was back on the beer and roll-ups. One particular evening, a load of punk rockers invaded the pub: I was again in there prior to starting work, and remember that Eddie was a little concerned - being sober - that the sight of these 'pogoing' youths would turn away some of the less boisterous clientele. I left him to his fate and heard the tale after. Far from turning away custom they had the place jumping - literally. They had brought their own punk records which Eddie obliged them by playing, and furthermore, by 9pm they had persuaded him to take to the drink again. Having been starved of alcohol for all of two days, Eddie was all the more susceptible to its effects, and by the end of the night was 'pogoing' with the best of them.

Next day in the Rabbie Burns, the co-owner, Pete, said as he was driving home from Lloret and passing the campground on the Barcelona road at 3am, he had in his headlights, caught a figure looking remarkably like Eddie climbing over the wall but had dismissed it from his mind. After all, what would a well known, bar owner in his late thirties be doing climbing over a campground wall? It was subsequently revealed by a sheepish Eddie, that it was indeed he that had climbed over the campground wall in response to the punk-rockers invitation to party, where they had sat down around a camp-fire drinking some lethal concoction or other, which had spilt on the tent and then somehow caught fire, an event that somehow had slipped by Eddie's memory banks.

"I woke up abahnt ten in the morning," said Eddie, "flat on mi back an by miself, an all I could see was this blue sky. There were these Spanish geezers starin, an all rarnd me were these bleedin ashes were the poxy tent had been - an' I aint seen them poxy, punks since!"

Although the Spanish were not noted by gastronomes of the time for their cuisine, I enjoyed their food. Along with their variety of exotic fish and shellfish, the Spanish strive to create a sauce to enliven the humblest of fare: a pigs hock or trotter served with a tomato-based sauce with onions, peppers, herbs and a hint of garlic, and cooked in red wine, would be transformed into a dish that bore no resemblance to its British equivalent. Nevertheless, when I arrived back in Calella and eating at the tried and trusted Trebol and in order to save money until I found work, I would revert to my main meal the old stand by, and cheapest dish on the menu: 'Huevos con patatas fritas' - egg and chips, served with a little bread. Not being a fried egg man however, the kindly lady of the establishment would provide me with just the one egg and charge me thirty pesetas. One day, the lady being absent I asked her husband, the fiery, red-headed Catalan, for my usual, with just the one egg.

"Why you no want two eggs?" said the irate owner.

"No quiero dos huevos." I flatly replied. He then retorted something to the effect, that if I only wanted one egg, I should go

home to England for it.

"Here," he said, raising his voice theatrically, with his right hand displaying two fingers and held dramatically aloft, "we serve two eggs." He then pirouetted abruptly on his heels and marched back to the kitchen. I arose with a quiet dignity and left. Dave, on hearing the story, said typically, "I wonder what he would have done if you had ordered Egg and Chips with NO eggs?"

But a true Scorpio never forgets an insult or embarrassment, and I would for the next month when passing in front of their portals, shout loudly towards the counter inside, "ONE EGG!" This was I know, rather childish, but I did obtain a frisson of satisfaction from it, even going international to match their menus, and would on alternate days shout the Spanish and German equivalents. I was just experimenting with the French and Danish versions and was thinking of including what would have been the piece-de-resistance, Catalan, when I moved to another apartment at the other end of town. I always wondered if the staff ever commented on the strange man who walked by shouting "ONE EGG!" at no-one in particular, in five different languages.

No such frugality was in evidence when the pub-owners and their staff would go to a restaurant or barbecue. Perhaps to say goodbye to someone who was leaving, or celebrate someone's birthday, or perhaps just to go for a break; when five of the six major British pubs would close for the afternoon. These were my favourite times in Calella, and one time apart from the beginning and end of a season when all the Brits and a few foreigners perhaps, mingled. A favourite spot was Mas Ferriol. Once just a farm, it lay several miles back from the coast, the only road being a pot-holed cart-track, upon which, many a taxi driver would refuse to go. Normally we would all pile in to the four or five cars of the pub owners, to rattle along the dusty and rocky road.

The restaurant was set among a wood, which had been partly cleared and studded with sawn-off tree trunks, on top of which were nailed thick, circular sections of knotty wood. On one side were two barbecue grills, rough constructions of bricks built up on three sides with an iron mesh on top. The usual routine was employed: Those who wished to play a football knock-about would get the game underway, while two or more Spanish speakers among us would enter the old restaurant to order the drinks, food and bread. Mas Ferriol was set in a time warp, and the very antithesis of a fast food restaurant, where orders for anything more than beer, wine, salad and bread had to be placed several hours before needed. It was owned and run by a family who were all at least normal retiring age, and moved at a slow and dignified amble, which seemed to lend them a certain dignity in a business not normally known for its serenity. But then, all the food was as fresh as it was possible to be. Mick, my barman colleague, once ordered rabbit for two Dutch friends of his - it arrived two hours later. Well, it had first to be caught, then killed, then skinned... Within half an hour, great plates of fresh, inch-thick, sliced and toasted bread appeared,

some smothered in fresh tomatoes and some plain, with a pot of aioli - garlic sauce - on the side. This was accompanied by bottles of chilled beer and dark-red wine in 'porros', the jug-like containers with the familiar tapered spouts, by which one could, if the knack had been mastered, drink from, or only half-drink from if it had not. Ten minutes later came the large oval plates of salad: crispy leaves of lettuce studded with black and green olives, wedges of tomato, small sections of egg, cheese and slices of spicy salami. An hour later the aroma of slowly broiling meat wafted over to where the dozen or so footballers playing with enthusiastic intensity in the hot sun were gradually enticed away to sample the fare. Spare ribs were always the first, followed by the spicy, plump and juicy butifarras or pork chops, all with the wonderful freshly-baked bread and washed down with copious draughts of the beer or wine. A Scots friend of mine always elected to drink his wine from the large end of the Porro. "Ah canna drink oot o' that wee thing at the end."

Although Calella was a small resort, this was - apart from the end of the season - the only time that the bar owners could get together, and to their credit, apart from some small discussion on prices and town hall politics, business was never allowed to dominate for long. Eddie would usually entertain us with some titbit or other about some 'geezer' or 'tart' who he had insulted in his pub, setting off some of the others, who would then try to out-do each other in the telling of tales about co-workers or 'punters' in their bars, resulting in fits of laughter. Finally we would all retire inside the rustic restaurant, where Dave, Jeff and sometimes myself would sing a few songs, while sipping at glass tumblers of carejillos - strong coffee laced with cognac or anis - which would help to keep us awake for the night time and the work to which we had reluctantly to return. I don't know if any other resort had such camaraderie among workers of different pubs, or held such improptu celebrations where the pub owners would close their pubs for the day, but these are among my most treasured memories, and if I was granted one wish to go back in time and savour just one day it would be at one of those barbecues.

It was now the back-end of the season, people were getting laid off from their jobs, and only the bare bones of a staff were left to cater for the diminishing tourists. I was one of the first to leave the 'Nags', and was paid the bonus which everyone received who stayed the course. Mine was 25,000 pesetas (£120) at that time. This, plus the money I had accumulated on my £45 a week net wage plus tips meant I had ample to enjoy my last two weeks. These last few days I enjoyed with Nanny, my young and attractive, Dutch girlfriend who, like Ingrid but even younger, was full of life. We would often go to 'Bobby's Bar' to see Dave perform, while his mate, Gary, attended the tables carrying a tray that bore a conspicuously large jar with **TIPS** written boldly upon it.

Dave had been in Barcelona hospital a long time with a broken leg, the result of being attacked by some Swiss lads at the start of the

season, causing him to miss three months work and he was now trying to earn enough for his fare back to Rotterdam. It was very much like the first time I had arrived three years previously. With that three years behind me I was a different person. I exuded more confidence and had a broader perspective. I could see why in the last century, wealthy persons would send their sons on the 'Grand Tour': It was a rounding off of their education, a widening of horizons. Would that it were extended to everyone, there would be far less problems with the rest of Europe today.

With the arrival of another final week it was time for end of season get-togethers. For some busy people, couriers and the like, it was the only chance they got to see friends not seen since the beginning of the season, many having worked in the neighbouring towns further up the coast. All these 'superstars' naturally gravitated to the 'Nags'. The mood among the workers was now a mixture of relief that another season was over, together with a glum realisation that many of these people you would never see again; for if I had learnt anything during my three years of travel, it was that the leaving of friends you had made and places you have loved, were the downside of such a life, sentimental fool that I am. On one of these final days we were assembled in the 'Nags'. Nanny, my girl, had now flown back to Amsterdam; Pluto was almost at the end of the 'Glass Key' and Dave, Gary, Jeff, Dolly and the rest of the now unemployed were in the 'Nags', reviewing the season and re-living the hunt that took place for the Swiss lads responsible for Dave's broken leg:

The day after the incident, around a dozen of us had gone from bar to bar, asking if anyone had seen them. On the surface it was like a latter-day lynch mob, but was actually an excuse for a bar crawl. Alan, a 'scouser' and a boyfriend of Sandra who worked in the 'Nags' and who also had a fondness for Brandy and soda, was with us. Alan wasn't a worker, but had been working in Saudi Arabia, made a pile of money and was here just for the 'crack'. This particular night, Alan tired of his favourite drink, saying: "it was doing mi guts in," and elected to go on the beer. As we went from pub to pub we were obliging the landlords by partaking of a 'bevvy' in each one. After the sixth or seventh, we were at the Farmers Arms, and received a tip that the Swiss lads may be in La Roda, a restaurant some streets away. We drank up quickly and moved outside. I knew Alan was struggling to drink his unaccustomed beer and waited at the door for him, till eventually he lurched out, hair awry and a glazed look in his eyes. He looked uncomprehendingly at me before stumbling on the step and clawing at the air, before saving his fall by grasping at the top of a small car that was parked immediately outside the entrance. Pausing for a while, he suddenly threw up a fountain of beer over the roof. A full minute elapsed before he turned to look at me with puffy, bloodshot eyes, his face suffused with alcohol and croaked: "It's no good Pete, I'll have to go back on the bloody brandies."

We were just laughing over the incident, when Gary motioned us to be

quite as Pluto was on the last page. We all knew that he had been reading the 'Glass Key' for three years, and when pressed about it, he would say that he meant to take it with him after each season, but would leave it behind only to pick it up and start at the beginning again. Whether this was true or not, no-one knew, but a dozen pairs of eyes now silently watched him. Pluto was oblivious of the sudden hush, absorbed as we were in the denouement to what surely must be a masterpiece to have had him in its thrall for so long, until, with each observer almost reading the book line by line with him, he finally reached the last sentence. Staring at the book, almost in disbelief that he had finished it, he closed it, flung it down and looked up and said with disgust: "Wor a load o' fuckin rubbish." It got the biggest laugh of the year.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I left Calella for Holland with Dave, Gary and Dave's Dutch girlfriend, Pauline. We travelled by car and reached Rotterdam a day later. Staying with Dave and Pauline in their house close to the Feyenoord football club stadium, things were as well as could be expected, given that I was suddenly thrust into their lives, an arrangement at which the most hospitable of people would eventually balk, so I attempted to find work quickly with a view to moving out. Gary and I soon obtained work with the local Uitzendburo, the Dutch equivalent of the British Manpower Agency and found ourselves working together in a factory that made kitchen furniture. The job was the kind that one could have trained monkeys to do, but the sheer simplicity and monotony of the job caused us eventually to stray from even this simple task:

It involved receiving chip-board sections of kitchen doors, coated with smooth plastic, and measuring some six by three feet and one inch thick from a machine, and stacking these on a nearby conveyor belt. The first stack was accomplished with no bother, and during a short pause, and now confident in our our new stacking skills, we lit up a joint, then, after normal service had been resumed and just as we were thinking it was money for old rope, the machine operator suddenly went berserk and began to spew the sections out like there would be no tomorrow. In our haste to keep up we began to panic, and soon the stack of doors was tilting drunkenly awry and began repelling each other like two dissimilar poles of a magnet. In between trying to keep the stack in some semblance of neatness, and running to get the next section, complete chaos ensued, the tiniest knock on the stack causing some half dozen to slide about uncontrollably. Finally, among fits of laughter we had to shout to tell the operator to turn off the machine. A subsequent enquiry by the irate foreman, whose stern demeanor was hardly lightened by our joint-induced giggling, meant we were not hired again.

A few days of idleness passed before I was assigned another job by the buro, as a labourer to a fitter/plumber called Joop, a pleasant enough fellow, but the conversation was stilted to say the least, he knowing hardly any English and I equally at loss with the Dutch language. We had to travel some 50 miles away to our first job. It appeared to be in the middle of nowhere and nothing in view but fields and a few cows lowing mournfully in the distance. There was an aroma of new mown grass, the kind called 'sweet vernal', that hung in the air and spoke of rustic charm and freshness. It was an oasis of tranquility compared to the motorway that had brought us here, and I was suddenly heartened to be in the midst of such pastoral fragrance. Joop surveyed the scene and seemed to have spotted the site he was searching for, while I looking around, could see nothing resembling pipes. He then lugged out a weighty canvas bag stuffed with tools and thrust it into my hands, then taking out a map of the terrain, perused it at great length before ordering me to follow him. We tramped round

the perimeter of a grassy field, while I was inwardly cursing both the weight of the bag and the unaccustomed cold. After some two hundred yards he stopped, turned an abrupt left and advanced for another fifty yards into the empty field. We had found our work site. It was covered by an old and rusted grating, and it was only by much tugging and grunting that we uncovered the abomination underneath.

The old cess pit had been evacuated and unused for a long while, but the fossilised detritus of its former contents remained. Joop took one look at the pipes, motioned me to remain, then returned to the van, returning with the largest adjustable wrench I had ever seen. He handed it to me and directed me down. Joop was clearly of the 'delegating of authority' school and not the 'hands on' kind. It was like descending into the bowels of hell, and although the stench normally associated with decayed faeces was thankfully absent, there were huge pipes affixed with flanges and bearing nuts the size of small plates, all encrusted with long-gone Dutch motions.

The aim of the exercise seemed to be the loosening of as many of the nuts as possible, and at Joop's direction while armed with the wrench as tall as me, I attempted to follow out his wishes. To enable me to do so however, entailed contortions that would have brought tears to the eyes of Harry Houdini. I remember being in a foetal position, my back against one pipe my feet braced against another, while attacking a third with the wrench, sweat dripping down my shirt and crusts of dried excrement flaking onto my head, while dreaming with longing of cleaning up vomit from the Nag's Head toilet. When feeling a little sorry for myself one day in the 'Nags', I had remarked to Math, that "I should be doing something better than this."

"It's all relative Pete, it's all relative," was his smooth reply. I wasn't quite convinced of the wisdom of that statement at the time, but when I was down that Dutch cess pit, chips of decrepit, hardened faeces covering my hair and disappearing down my neck, I realised with stark clarity what he meant.

The following week I was still with Dave and Pauline, and thinking of moving before being asked to do so, meanwhile the bureau had arranged for me to go with Joop to Groningen the far north of Holland, a trip I wasn't looking forward to with particular relish, when on Saturday morning a sudden ring on the doorbell took Dave down to see who it was. It was my old mates from Yorkshire, Martin and Trevor who, enticed by the high wages in Holland for British bricklayers at that time, were taking advantage of the situation and wanted me to work with them as their labourer. Despite never having worked on a building site before I agreed immediately. The money was too good to turn down - 16 Guilders (£4) an hour tax free. In 1978 that was good money!

Martin told me that I was to take the place of a lad called Lennie who had been turned out of his lodge for peeing the bed when drunk, and who, on pleading with the landlady was re-instated, only to subsequently crap himself in the same bed the following night! I began

to think how I was once again involved with drunken incontinents, and had a sudden terrifying vision of Plop, Sam and Lennie in bed together after a night on the beer, but put it hastily out of my mind. "Fancy peeing yourself at that age," I said scornfully. A remark that came back to haunt me.

We were esconsed in a Hotel in the town of Middelburg and travelled each day by car to a village called Arnemuïden. The work was simple enough once I'd been shown how to work the mixer, and how much of the ingredients to shovel in. The hardest part was wheeling the barrow laden with concrete up the narrow board and up to the site. Several times I was on the point of losing the contents, my heavy barrow wavering on the groaning board as I wrestled with it, arms and legs straining and my face contorted with effort. Like many other tasks though, there is a knack to it which had to be acquired. It was not brute strength that ensured a smooth passage, but a run at the incline followed by a leaning into the barrow, arms behind the body, almost pulling instead of shoving.

The work was not particularly hard once I got into the routine, but it was a long day, awaking before seven to go down to the breakfast table and greet your fellow British workers who were working at several other sites, but most of the lads were good company and complete harmony reigned as we swapped tales of different working conditions, and other matters that Brits talk about when flung together in a foreign environment, one that was well portrayed in the TV programme 'Auf Wiedersehen Pet' some years later. There were exceptions however, and these were a family trio from Liverpool. A father, his son, and the father's brother. They caused no trouble, but would continually talk about the most banal things as if they were earth-shattering events and argue about it. The son, a young lad of about twenty three was a fitness freak, and would go for a run, shower, and then come down for breakfast bright as a button and prattle on while the rest of us were hung over from the night before. It was this early morning vitality that seemed to annoy everybody, even before he started to speak. As a prelude to his inanities and after the first sip of his coffee, every morning he would declare "this coffee's great". At first no-one took any notice, but after a while it began to be an expected ritual and when one day he failed to say it, someone said it for him.

"I know it is" he gushed, "I always say that, don't I dad, eh?" His dad nodded wearily, "yes son, now eat yer breakfast will yer."

It was two weeks later that we received our first payment, and a fair amount it was at that time. It was on the strength of this bonanza that we went out on the town the Saturday night. I can't remember anything of the night, only that we were in a small bar and dispatching the small Dutch beers with enough regularity to cause our host to ask for payment when the pen strokes on the coaster had reached only half-way round, and we were intent on going round the clock. Possibly he had been stung by treacherous Brits before. It is a

practise usually confined to our island race only who, confronted with a continental payment policy that depends on honesty, to our shame fail to keep their side of the bargain. It is certainly true to say that some of these 'honour' practises adopted abroad would never work in Britain: In Garmisch, the bus for the Eibsee lake where the cable car to the Zugspitze mountain could be caught, would have a rack attached to the back where skiers would deposit their skis before boarding the bus. I can just imagine that practise in Britain. It is a sad thing to say, but the whole thing would be abused. I can just imagine some yob getting off the bus a stop or two before the destination and nicking as many skis as he could. Later that night as we returned to our hotel, Martin seized a bike propped against a wall and attempted to ride it, then invited the heavyweight Trevor to jump on the saddle behind him, resulting in the back wheel folding like a pancake, and then, abandoning the forlorn bike and laughing fit to bust, making our way back to the hotel.

Much the same sort of high spirits took place the following night and then about two or three in the morning while fast asleep, I dreamt that I was peeing the bed. I then woke up and realized that I had! How was this possible? I had never before wet the bed after a surfeit of booze. I gathered the sodden sheet, mopped up as much surplus liquid from the mattress as I could, stuffed the sheet under the bed and racked my brain. There was a linen cupboard on the landing, will it be open? I crept out to the landing and pulled on the handles. Yes! It was. With relief I took another sheet, closed the doors and crept back to bed. I awoke groggily, determined not to admit the shameful incident and went down to breakfast. The Liverpool father and son were in full flow, and arguing about the Gobi Desert:

"It's the Gobi," said the father.

"It's the Kobi," replied the son.

"It's not, I tell yer, it's the bloody Gobi." An argument over the correct spelling of an expanse of wasteland thousands of miles away, while attempting to eat breakfast in a Dutch hotel prior to starting work constructing buildings, only added to the air of surreality I already felt after 'wetting' the bed.

It didn't stop at the Gobi desert however. The son, feeling particularly enamoured of the coffee that morning asked for more, and said the well worn, "this coffee's great isn't it dad, isn't the coffee great"? Dad put down his egg spoon with a clatter, we all sensed that he had reached the breaking point of patience with his loony offspring. After putting his head in his hands he looked up at the bright eyes of his son, he, like the rest of us had had enough.

"We know the coffee's great," he said wearily. He started quietly, his voice rising steadily. "Yer tell us every friggin morning, the friggin' coffee's great. We can't have our breakfast in peace for you telling us how great the friggin' coffee is. NOW PACK IT IN AND EAT YER FUCKIN' EGG."

After breakfast, taking our packed lunches from the sideboard we

went outside to the car. The 'scousers' were having difficulty with the starting of their car and we watched them, fascinated. Uncle was at the wheel, the other two shoving behind in an attempt to bump-start the vehicle into life. They were still arguing. The son had left his lunch behind and his father was remonstrating with him, and after each sentence, dad's voice would again rise in pitch:

"Have yer got yer lunch son?"

"No, I've left it on the sideboard."

"Go and get it then son, pant."

"No, I'll help get the car started first."

"Go and get it, puff."

"I'll get it after, dad."

"Get it now son, you've paid for it, grunt."

"It'll be alright."

"Will yer go and get the bloody thing, gasp."

"In a bit, dad."

"GO GET THE BLOODY THING BEFORE SOMEBODY FRIGGIN' NICKS IT," shouted the exasperated father, his face now the colour of beetroot. The thought had never occurred to them to stop pushing while this intriguing dialogue was taking place.

We left the loony duo and entered the car, I taking my customary seat in the back, still laughing over the scousers. It was some miles along the road, and what with the Gobi Desert, the 'friggin' coffee' and the left lunch dispute I had forgotten about the bed-wetting of the previous night, when Trevor suddenly spoke up in our native South Yorkshire accent.

"Tha'll never guess what ah did last neet." Martin glanced at him while maintaining the car on an even keel.

"What?" we both chorused. We knew it was something funny. Trevor had that little half-grin on his face that always presaged something either funny or stupid. It was however, the last thing I expected to hear in the circumstances:

"ah pissed t'bed last neet." Martin and I bust out laughing, though for slightly different reasons.

"Tha pissed t'bed?" echoed Martin, laughing.

"Ah," said Trevor, "luckily t'linen cupboard wor op'n." I couldn't keep quite any longer.

"I know it wor op'n," I said. "I op'nd it... cos ah pissed bed an' all." At this, we all erupted with a great shout of laughter, Martin having to stop the car for a few minutes for safety reasons, while the full confessions of the two bed-wetters were revealed.

Shortly after we were moved to Zoutland in the area of Zeeland. As the name suggests it is by the sea. In summer it was a resort for Dutch and Germans, but at that time of the year was deserted. I wasn't there very long before I was moved, but stayed long enough to experience the feel of the place, it had all the allure of a wet Sunday in Chernobl. If my doctor ever tells me that I've only one year to live, I would move to Zoutland. There it would feel like five!

We were renting a house, and Trevor urged us to save a little money by stopping in and drinking cheap beers bought in the supermarket, meanwhile he would cook, and Martin and I would wash-up. This neat arrangement lasted two days. Being driven mad by the sheer boredom of life without even a television, Martin and I began to go out to the sparsely attended local pubs, *and* drink at home. This was greeted with clucks of disapproval from the prudent Trevor. After much moaning from Martin we eventually persuaded the landlord to bring in a television. It was of the type that Logie-Baird must have been familiar with, having knobs as big as saucers and valves as big as pint pots. It took two minutes to warm up, and we watched with fascination as the first flickering, black and white pictures slowly claimed our attention. The first of the three channels available seemed to be a news broadcast, the second, a children's programme of some kind, switching to the third, showed us a picture of people working in fields. I turned to Martin and was about to comment on the poor quality of the picture, when he exclaimed with disgust "well that's not much good - it's all in fuckin' Dutch!"

CHAPTER NINE

The work in Holland had built up my bank balance considerably, which helped to keep me in a more affluent idleness on the dole back in England, before obtaining work in May 79 as a park-keeper just outside Doncaster. The park personnel were remarkably similar to the type who work in German hotels, in that it convinced me it was mandatory to have some physical or mental deformity to be employed for temporary work with the council - myself of course excepted. The casting director for 'Deliverance' need have looked no further. The only person who I found I communicate with to any degree was the man who ran the hiring of the row-boats on the lake, and he was a Ukranian.

The park closed for the winter in October, and together with my friend, 'Gig', Took our cycles on a trip to Israel via Holland, Germany, a train to Athens, a boat to Crete, Athens again, then plane to Egypt then Jordan and Israel. It was a long but pleasant, almost trouble-free trip which took some three months and satisfied some of my curiosity regarding Jerusalem, whose old city is a fascinating time capsule set in stone and a joy to meander around. Then it was back to England for Christmas, before travelling again.

It was September of 1980 when I returned to Garmisch. I had pitched a tent among trees just outside the American campground and by the American school, this obviated the need to pay camping fees but proved false economy, as on the third day my tent was ransacked and my sleeping bag and camera stolen. Fortunately my camera was a cheap one and no great loss, but my stolen sleeping bag hastened my search to find a doss.

I knew no-one in Garmisch now except Keith the American tour guide and Martin and Mary, old friends from the 75/77 era but through frequenting the nearest pub to the barracks, 'The Last Chance', so named because it was the last chance for a beer on that side of the road before entering Austria - not strictly true as there was a gasthaus on the border - I soon discovered a friend of Seamus, who told me that the man himself had been here in my absence and had gone back to attend university but was due back soon. Through much conscientious and diligent frequenting of the 'Chance', involving as it did, much tasting of the splendid Hacker-Pschorr beer, I eventually met two English girls living in the annex who invited me to share their three-women room, in which there was a spare bed. I was more than happy to take up this invitation and in no time settled happily back in the old routine.

It was not the place I had left some years before, there were far more British people and the old PX restaurant which we few Brits had used as a meeting place had been refurbished and the short order cafe given over to machines that dispensed weak, insipid coffee and even worse tea, and where a chilled hamburger was delivered in a polythene bag to be then transferred to a micro-wave oven. The soggy result of this

new culinary practise was appalling even by the standards of AFRC.

In order to maintain my fitness I made it a practise of going to the Gymnasium almost every day, where George was still supervisor, along with long hikes in the fabulous countryside, it made me appreciate what I had been missing since my departure. There is no other smell like alpine air after the rain. In the spring or autumn the rain can last for days, but when it relents, to stroll along the small paths that criss-cross the fields or climb up the mountains to some small gasthaus, while grabbing lungfuls of pristine air, and with the backdrop of solid, grey mountains are one of nature's delights and can only be appreciated fully by someone not born into such an environment.

It surprised many people at the time, that I was claiming dole while seeking work. My money being paid through the scheme whereby members of the EU can look for work and be paid the amount of money normally paid by your particular country. The official at the unemployment centre was slightly bemused, and looked with a fair amount of scepticism at my presentation of the official document that I presented to him; even though it was written in German. It requested the relevant department of the particular area in which I was seeking work, to grant me assistance and to pay me for a maximum of three months, the sum currently being paid to 'Her Majesty's Subjects'. At that time it was I think, £27 a week. It was obviously the first time that the official had seen such a document, and I am sure he thought it a scam cooked up by me in order to obtain money from the German Government. After a check with various colleagues and being met with shrugs of bewilderment, he came back and said he would make enquiries, and 'could I come back tomorrow?' I returned next day to find the path to obtaining the munificent sum afforded me to have been eased by enquiries to Munich. He was now courteous and helpful, and even found a few words of English to wish me good luck. My suspicions were that he could speak adequate English should the need have arose, but like certain officials all over the world decided to make things harder for the foreigner.

I then found casual work, which needed no official forms or other bureaucracy; as long as I worked only about 50 hours a month. This work strangely enough paid more than the normal rate. It was at that time £1-75p an hour. The work was in the International Grill, the place in which I first encountered the American culture and where I first met my British friends some years before. Together with Dave, a lad from Orpington, I was working as a dish washer and 'Bus Boy'. When I first heard the term I had no idea what to expect, I held a vague idea of opening doors as the shuttle buses arrived and escorting the passengers to their tables. It turned out to be one who 'Busses' tables - clears the empty dishes and replaces condiments and soiled tablecloths etc. The boss, Joe, dressed like many of the blacks when not on duty, like a drug dealer from Harlem, with bright, sharply pressed suits and colourful ties, hands adorned with rings, gold

bracelets and smart, highly polished shoes. After 2 weeks he seemed sufficiently impressed to sign me on as permanent at forty two hours a week, which entitled me to a room in the infamous Annex.

Shortly afterwards Seamus arrived, thus my main link with the old Garmisch was restored, and we spent much time filling in the gaps since our last meeting. He was in Garmisch between terms at Glasgow university and over to see some old friends, 'Sweat' and 'Phenol', who I had met in the last few weeks. They were two of several people who entered Garmisch legend.

Seamus, appraising me of the characters of this duo, told me of the time that he, Phenol, and a few more lads went to visit a bar in Oberammergau. On the way home, it wasn't until more than half way to Garmisch that they realised Phenol was no longer with them - which said something about their condition. Apparently Phenol had drunk himself into so much oblivion that he had been unable to stagger out with the rest, and finding a table at the back of the bar, he had crept underneath and fallen asleep. Upon rising at 8am, bewildered, hung-over and far from home, he found himself in his idea of paradise: locked in an empty bar complete with working beer pumps. Despite the early hour, he pulled himself two pints, drank up, then nipped smartly out of the toilet window.

His second anecdote concerned 'Sweat', A Dubliner and another hardy drinker. He was in his mid-twenties and had some years before, met and married a Swedish girl while working as a dishwasher at a hotel some miles from Garmisch, 'Schloss Elmau'. It appeared that while back with his bride in Sweden and while she was out of the house, he had made mad, passionate love to her mother who, according to Sweat, was more than willing, and 'did everything.' Unfortunately he was caught 'flagrante delicto' by his shocked wife, and the marriage was ignominiously dissolved. Sweat maintained that the mother was an 'attractive bird in her late forties,' but Seamus said that 'she must have been a dirty old slut if she would have Sweat in the first place,' given that he neglected his body to the extent that he had the fragrance of a rancid pole cat. For all that, Sweat was an intelligent and amusing character and decent looking. He had however the usual Garmisch curse, a love of the drink, and was scornful of exercise or even a change of clothing.

A story told by Sweat himself illustrates the man perfectly: It was while in Munich that he went to purchase a pair of jeans in a clothes store. After finding a pair that he liked, the assistant asked if he "wanted to wear them now?" "Yes," replied Sweat, and so the assistant gingerly picked up the rancid cast-offs with a coat hanger, and thrust them in a bag for Sweat to take with him. After calling at the Station in order to see the times of trains, Sweat then threw the old jeans in a nearby dumpster while he nipped to the nearest pub for a few beers. On his return to the Station, he saw an old tramp rooting around in the dumpster among the plastic bags and refuse, watched as the old wino plucked out the bag that Sweat had thrown away, then dragging

out the festering contents and with a look of total disgust on his face, the tramp hastily threw the old jeans back in the dumpster. Sweat apparently found this hilarious.

Sheamus was on holiday, but typically British, he had got himself a doss in the annex. He related that the members of his room consisted of three legitimate inhabitants and seven others, all dossers, and all in a space the size of a normal living room, remarking that the smell would make a skunk gag and that the room was so filthy even the cockroaches were on stilts. I meanwhile had moved into a room of my own, well, a shared room. Gone were the days when I could cajole the boss of housing into giving me a single room. This was a 3-man room, for which I paid the outrageous sum of £8 a month, my other two room-mates being an English guy who knew everything, and consequently I never got on with, "all hat and no cattle," a Texan friend said of him, and an American, Dan, who was a pleasant and generous guy who hadn't been long here in Garmisch and was still adjusting to the change.

Steve and I were both going out with two American girls from North Carolina and it was a relief to see him eventually move out and live with his girl, this meant there was a spare bed which, according to the code of the Garmisch dosser's ethic, meant it had to be filled by the first needy vagrant that happened to cross my path. I already had a semi-dosser, a Scots lad we called Daft Charlie. He was great fun on account of him being, well, daft. There was no other adjective that could better describe him. He was not a permanent dosser as he liked to float around the annex as a kind of court jester, driving everyone crazy. Charlie's daftness could best be illustrated thus: He had at that time a tendency to wind people up by telling selected victims of his loony humour some outrageous tale, all a complete fabrication of his warped mind, and when the innocent victim would respond with incredulity, would then launch into a rousing version of 'Knees up Mother Brown' complete with actions, as if this rendition of an obscure, cockney song would explain away the reason for tales of complete rubbish.

Phenol for example, who was enjoying a beer in the 'Chance' and in merry company, was told one day by Charlie that he had just been to the Sheridan Hotel - where Phenol had applied for a job - and that the secretary there wanted to see him about the position. Phenol, desperate for a job, drank up and trotted off, only to confront Charlie twenty minutes later with the report that the secretary knew nothing about it. Charlie listened to him with a bland expression on his face, save a twinkle in his eye and a ghost of a smile that played around his lips, before launching into 'Knees up Mother Brown' etc. After a week or so of this lunacy he had exhausted all the Brits' patience, but there were the Americans....

At that time some Americans had been taken hostage in Iran, and was the leading story in the 'Stars and Stripes', the American forces newspaper. Dan was taking a nap on his bed one afternoon while I was

reading said paper, suddenly Charlie bounced in and we got to talking, then presently Dan woke up rubbing sleep from his eyes.

"Hey Dan," said Charlie with mock gravity, "guess what? The Iranians have shot all the American hostages." Dan was alive in an instant. "No! They haven't. Have they?" genuine shock on his face. "Yes," said Charlie, gravely, "6 o'clock this morning," Dan put his head in his hands, "Oh man," he groaned.

"Knees up Mother Brown, Knees up Mother Brown," sang Charlie. Dan lifted his head up, and watched with amazement. I was in hysterics, laughing purely at the utter bewilderment on Dan's face.

"No, they haven't really," said Charlie, after completing his little song and dance and straightening his face.

"You shouldn't joke about things like that Charlie," drawled Dan. Later, when Charlie had gone out to annoy someone else, Dan looked at me and said in that serious way of talking he had. "You know, I like Charlie, but I can't figure him out - and who's that goddam Mother Brown?"

The dubious honour of being my official dosser finally fell to an American man and his wife who had recently arrived in town. Bill was his name, or as he was generally known in the years that followed, 'Big Bill'. He was big in every sense, about 6'3" broad chested, pony-tailed, slow talking and good humoured, with a generous nature and a placid temperament - a gentle giant.

He and his wife, Kathy, a fervent buddhist, took up the bedspace and proved excellent room-mates, although in the beginning I would become puzzled, while laying on my bed, to hear what appeared to be a droning sound. At first I thought it was some bee or wasp that had found its way into the room and was reluctant to die with its comrades in the ever increasing cold air outside. It wasn't until one morning while passing Bill and Kathy's bed space near the door, that I noticed this strange drone was emanating from their area. Noticing a slight gap in the curtains surrounding their space, and unable to resist finding out the cause, I peeped in. I could see the back of Kathy's head. She was kneeling down at the side of the bed, it then dawned on me that it was her low, sonorous Buddhist chanting that I was hearing, but what was she praying to? I boldly but quietly moved the curtains a little wider. Bill was fast asleep on the bed, the bed-clothes had been kicked aside and he was laid on his back asleep, stark-naked and exhibiting a large erection. On telling the tale afterwards, I made it plain that although Kathy was worshipping a small statue of Buddha which was out of my sight, and not Bill's phallus, at first glance that's what it looked like. Come to think, I never did get round to telling 'Big Bill' that tale.

One good thing about the annex was that one could never be lonely, and like other occupants I was always subject to people popping in to visit. Most of whom, apart from two middle-aged German batchelors and the Greeks and Turks, comprised of young Brits and Americans in their twenties, gregarious and confident - except for 'Nervous Pete'. When I first met him I was with Dave, my workmate and friend, and on

being introduced he grasped my hand with both of his:

"I'm Pete," he said, "it's nice to meet another Pete, I don't think there's another Pete in the Annex, well, if there is another Pete I don't know of one, unless that man who lives next to me is called Pete, but I think he's Greek so he can't be called Pete can he?" I was floundering for a reply, when he said:

"Can I come to see you in your room?" I was again searching for a reply, when he continued: "I get a bit nervous on my own sometimes you see, and like to chat a bit, if it's no trouble. I get letters from my girlfriend, I'll read some to you, she's a night club hostess in Paris." I nodded dumbly to this torrent of information and made a croaky reply of assent.

"I'll see you later then," he said, and zipped away before I could fully comprehend the meaning of the one-sided conversation that had just taken place.

"Who's that?" I gasped to Dave after his departure.

"That's 'Nervous Pete,'" he said, laughing, and began to tell me the story of Pete and his girlfriend:

It appeared that Pete had a girlfriend who was French, lived in Paris, and was - unknown to Pete - a 'lady of the night'. Apparently this fact was known to quite a few people, through the indiscreet reporting back of an acquaintance of Pete's, who had been to see her at his bidding while passing through Paris. The acquaintance had not the heart to tell Pete his girlfriend's profession however, so he maintained Pete's image of her that that she was just a night club hostess. It was the start of quite a few chats between Pete, myself and whoever else happened to be in the room, and always started the same way. First with a hesitant knock, followed by my shouting for him to come in, followed by a head peeping round the door, a stammered apology for disturbing me, then finally a request to come in.

Dave and I were in my room one day around noon and partaking of a rather cheeky, Rumanian red, 'Valea Lunga', a snip at DM5 for a 1-1/2 Ltr bottle. It was almost Christmas, the snow lay thick upon the ground outside and it was again snowing heavily. I was standing by the window, when my eyes were diverted from the appraisal of the wine to the courtyard below, where a figure topped by a curious kind of headwear was trying to attract my attention. It was Nervous Pete. I opened the two stout window frames, looked down on him and asked what he wanted. "Well," he said, "I was wondering, if you're not doing anything like, if er, you don't mind that is, I mean, if I can, that is if you have time"....I interrupted the rambling monologue. "Pete, come in for God's sake," I shouted, and shut the window.

A minute later, a knock came at the door and I boomed out an invitation to enter. The door opened slowly and a pinched, red-nosed face, topped by a snow-laden hat edged its way cautiously round it.

"Hello Pete. Oh, hello Dave, can I come in? If you're busy I can come back." I sighed wearily, while Dave gave a little titter. "No Pete, come on in."

"I've just come to read you a letter from my girlfriend, he said, she's a night club hostess in Paris."

"Yes Pete we know," I replied a little testily. Although a lovely guy, he could be very wearing.

He sat down and read out the brief contents of the letter, which described her work as not difficult and the money was good.

"She says I can go and see her," said Pete, brightly, "but only in the daytime, she's busy at night you know. I think things are getting on top of her." Dave cut short a laugh, while I attempted to keep a straight face.

During the recitation of the letter, snow from his hat had slowly melted, revealing lurid green, red and purple colours. It was a woolen hat that could be seen worn by the natives of Tibet, the type that had a pointed peak and two pieces that curled up at the sides. On a Tibetan, and in Tibet it would not look out of place, on Pete and in Garmisch it looked ridiculous.

"How do you like the hat then?" he said, as he gradually noticed us eyeing it with amusement. "I bought it from somebody who had been to Nepal, I wear it all the time now."

"Why's that Pete?" I asked.

"It's the rays from the Zugspitz," he whispered darkly. "Not many people know that the rays of the sun reflect off the high mountains and penetrate your skull." Dave, who was just taking a sip of his wine spluttered into his glass.

"You believe that do you?" I said, trying hard to restrain the laughter that was bubbling inside me. "Well," he said, "I know I feel better now, before I wore it I thought I was going daft."

After a month of working in the 'Grill', I was promoted to food service helper. This involved dispensing drinks and shouting out by means of a microphone, the numbers on the tickets that tallied with the meals ordered. The cook on one of the shifts was a young Scots lad, John. A rarity in that he was a trained chef, unlike the majority of cooks who made up the kitchen staff at AFRC. I will say this for them though, they never let a simple thing like experience get in their way when employing people: The Sheridan Hotel had as their 'Mexican' chef, an ex-bricklayer from Birmingham who, when first starting his new profession, didn't know a taco from a tomato. I heard him once pronounce on one of his dishes in his nasal and monotone 'Brummy' accent, "It's a bit like bricklaying really. You just mix all the ingredients together in the right proportions and slap it on."

An even worse culinary calamity, was one of the 'short order' cooks we had to work with, an obese American we called 'Fat Mark'. He was built like the slob character, 'Dobermann', in the Sgt Bilko T V series of the 50s. He was about thirty years of age and my height, but about 60 pounds heavier. He wore dirty, once-white trainers, trousers that appeared to be two or three inches too long due to the waistband losing the struggle to maintain its position around his ample waist, while the buttons on his chef's jacket seemed always on

the verge of being pinged into space. He had a perpetual greasy look on his turnip of a face that enclosed two piggy eyes, together with lank wisps of hair that followed no recognisable style or pattern, along with a curious habit of snorting air down his nostrils at the end of each sentence.

There was no more repulsive sight than when he was bent over the hotplate, to see the sweat from his brow dripping onto the already greasy hamburgers, while at the rear, his trousers had ridden down to the extent that a great hairy chasm between his short jacket and his trousers would be exposed, disappearing into what, I shuddered to think. Joe would often catch him in this stomach-churning position and chide him gently, using all the psychology, tact and man-management accumulated through many years: "MARK, YOU SONOFABITCH, PULL YOUR GODDAM TROUSERS PAST YOUR FAT ASS!"

Mark prided himself on being the fastest cook in AFRC. Not a claim to fame that many would like to make in my opinion, as most of the food was bad enough when cooked slowly. But the reason why, was that he would half-cook the frozen patties of meat before placing them in a metal dish that he filled with warm water, where they would wallow like grey-red water lilies, slowly oozing their fat and blood, then, when an unsuspecting customer arrived, and upon hearing the request for a hamburger placed with the cashier, he would swiftly scoop out one of these curled up specimens and plonk them on the grill. Often, the person had barely time to sit down before their number was called, and if they complimented him on his speed he would glow with pride, his piggy eyes shining with delight. One day he presented an old Vietnam veteran with a hamburger after he had barely finished ordering. The man was receiving a carton of coffee from me when Mark personally handed it over to him.

"There you are sir, snort, the fastest hamburger in the west, snort!" This delivery was mixed with a twinkle in his piggy eyes, and a chuckle at his perceived wit. The man looked at the hamburger, took off the top half of the bun and said in a slow southern drawl,

"Of all the sorry-looking Goddam things I've seen, this beats the Vietnam fuck-up hands down," his war-torn eyes giving Mark a look that froze the smile on his greasy face. Of course, I hastened into the back room to report this comment, and the look on Mark's face to Dave. When news of this altercation was passed on to the backroom kitchen staff, Loud laughter ensued.

His culinary pride was dented once more, when a British soldier, a sergeant, came in and said "I want a hamburger, frozen on the inside burnt on the outside, on a stale bun with a limp lettuce and a squashed tomato." Mark looked at him, with a knowing smirk on his face while shaking his fat head, saying "You won't get that around here sir, snort!"

"Well I sure as hell did yesterday", said the man. More laughter issued from the back room.

It was while leaving the kitchen one night after an afternoon shift, that upon attempting to enter the adjacent bar, I was met by two MP's

frog-marching a wildly-kicking and swearing man from the premises. It was my first sight of 'Irish Ron': He was about my height and age, with a lion of a head topped with unruly brown-red springy hair-like a bust sofa. He had teeth of varying yellow hues, and a broad lump of a nose that looked as though it had been added as an afterthought. He apparently owned land in Ireland which he would sell off in acre plots, then come over to Garmisch to doss, and drink it all away. As far as I knew he never worked in Germany, although I feel he must have done at one time, his German being pretty sound. He was in his own words, just here for the 'crack'. He was to make several of these ventures in the coming years, always being certain of finding a doss in the annex, until his drunken revelling landed him in trouble with the military police, and thus bringing down their wrath on the brave legal residents, known in annex-speak as 'dossmeisters'. This forced him to find refuge in the most unlikely places.

The 'Rod and Gun Club' by the campground was being pulled down and a new bar built in its place, and in the hiatus of construction and during the winter, Ron with a blanket and pillow would sneak up into the loft and bed down for the night. In the morning, knowing the police were hunting for him, he would remove all trace of his existence before sneaking out again. Unfortunately the MP's searched the building early one morning and disturbed him. It was said later that he would have escaped capture, but for attempting a get-away, where he plunged through the soft plaster board of the loft floor, leaving him stranded with legs dangling in full view of the marauding MP's, who then had the easy task of apprehending him.

During this time, Irish Ron had developed a crush on an English girl who went by the unedifying name of 'Slut Janet', but was too shy to do anything about it. Not as though his feelings would have been reciprocated, even by her, as his drunken and outlandish exploits were known to all. However he could talk quite intelligently on a number of subjects in English or German, but was always tongue-tied when confronted with the object of his adoration. On this particular day, six of us were ensconced in a downtown gasthaus where Janet was sat opposite Ron. The drinks were flowing freely which seemed to loosen his tongue a little, but he still failed to make more than stilted conversation with her. On a visit to the toilet he confessed to Sweat that he would like to make the conversation more intimate, but was waiting for an opening. "If she does," said Sweat, "say something nice to her." He was somewhat fortified by this advice, and reinforced it in the form of tumblers of 'Sauerfritz', a favourite schnapps of ours made from limes, that while tasting delicious was quite potent. Meanwhile the conversation had turned to British food that we missed while in Germany: "Chocolate digestive biscuits," I said. "Danish Bacon," said another, which although not British was as near as dammit.

"Ah! Proper chips," sighed Dave, a dreamy look in his eyes. "From a 'chippie', and eaten from a newspaper," said Janet in assent. Ron looked at her with one eye closed for better focus, and it seemed,

as it often does in declarations of portentous embarrassment, that the whole pub had fallen silent for about five seconds as he slurred out his undying passion for her in his earthy Irish brogue: "Ah Janet, **OI'D EAT CHIPS OUT O' YER KNICKERS."**

Seamus had by now departed, leaving me better acquainted with both Phenol and Sweat. On a good day Sweat looked like Jimmy Connors, the tennis player; normally though, he just looked like Jimmy Connors on a 'session'. He was like the rest of us at that time a fierce drinker, but unlike most of us who were content with eight hours sleep, Sweat could sleep for two days, rising only to perform his ablutions before returning to his 'pit'. As long as I knew him, he had never rose above the position of dishwasher(spüler), and indeed, he never expressed the desire to, being content to be submerged in the recesses of some hotel or restaurant where no-one bothered him, leaving him free to assault the beer machines in comparative leisure. Like Irish Ron, he hated authority and paid it little respect. When I see re-runs of Rab C Nesbitt on the T V, a picture of Sweat and Irish Ron, and their attitude to life springs instantly to mind. Seamus told me once of the time he and Sweat both worked in the small hotel 'Schell' near the station:

Apparently, Sweat became quiet friendly with the head chef, not a usual state of affairs, as in a German kitchen the head chef is God, and the spüler the lowest of the low. It was I believe, their mutual liking of British football, and the fact that Sweat was Irish - the chef having enjoyed a holiday there at one time - that enabled them to converse in a manner not normally assumed by persons having those two starkly divergent positions. One Saturday evening, Sweat, starting at 2pm, had swallowed a few 'liveners' in the 'Chance' before making his way reluctantly to work. This particular Saturday, his favourite team, Liverpool, was playing, and Sweat was sure that the chef who was due in at six would know the scores, so he spüled away in between nips to the beer machine, until the chef came in. Apparently, Sweat had drank more than his normal quota of 'liveners' before he started work that day, and was still attacking the beer machine with gusto when the head-chef came in followed by a crowd of young, trainee 'chefettes' around him, and was explaining matters culinary to them, the callow youths hanging on every word from the great man. Suddenly the instruction was shattered, as from across the room an intemperate Sweat bawled out

"Hey Manfred, how's Liverpool got on?" The youths turned round, amazed that a spüler, a foreigner at that, was interrupting the head-chef. Manfred ignored him.

"Hey Manfred," bellowed Sweat, "are yez fookin deaf or what, how's Liverpool got on?" The youths were now indignant at the interruption and motioned for Sweat to be quiet. Manfred raised a deprecatory hand and continued explaining his culinary knowledge to the earnest youths. Next thing he knew was that he felt his tall, pristine white, chef's hat being knocked from his head. Sweat was up close to him, his beery breath causing Manfred to take a step

backwards, while the youths were shocked into silence. This was unheard of, a lowly spüler knocking off the head chef's hat!

"I said," slurred the swaying Sweat, "how's Liverpool got on?" Manfred took the hat, retrieved by one of the youths, placed it solely on his head and pointed to the door, indicating Sweat's spüling days at the hotel were over. This sudden redundancy bothered Sweat little. His attitude to work, as to life, was at best a tenuous arrangement with the normal practises of the Protestant work ethic adopted by most of society, but he enjoyed life and was amusing, while harming no-one, and I suppose that's an ethos in itself.

It was a hot summer's day. I was with Sweat and a mutual friend, 'Paralytic Pete', or 'Para' as he was better known. We were in a bar, the 'Rosen Ecke', one day around noon. Sweat, now working in another German hotel had decided that working the afternoon shift in a hot, stinking kitchen when there was such a beautiful day to enjoy would, in his own words, "be a fookin sin," and declared he would instead attend the river-party later that day. 'Para' carried a plastic bag full of half-litre beer bottles intended for admission to that very party, one that was held from time to time by the Loisach river which ran near the American barracks, where crates of beer were purchased, deposited in the river to keep cool and a barbecue set-up. They were enjoyable events and well attended, where much beer was consumed and not a few joints smoked, and often ending up on hot days, with much frolicking in the ice-cool river. Sweat wanted very much to go. So much so, that he hit on the great idea of faking an injury to excuse himself from work and was racking his devious brain how best to affect this, resulting in the ensuing bizarre conversation:

"I know," he said to Para, "hit me with one o dem beer bottles."

"But they're full," said Para.

"I know dey're fookin full," replied Sweat, "all the better."

"But they'll fizz up and leak out of the tops, its happened to me before."

"What!" said Sweat, "you've been hit with a full beer bottle before?" Para sighed.

"I want yez to hit me on der tumb," said Sweat, looking appraisingly at the digit.

"Won't it hurt?" Said Para.

"Of course it'll fookin hurt," said Sweat scornfully, "but it's for a good cause."

"How hard should I hit it?" requested the nervous Para.

"Enough to make a bruise," suggested Sweat.

"Why don't you just say you've a bad back or something?" I said, seeing no reason for such lunacy.

"I had one o dem tree weeks ago," said Sweat, "dey'll never believe me again, I want sumpin dat'll show."

"Try insanity," I said. Sweat ignored the dry comment, spread his hand on the table and taking a deep draught of his ale, closed his eyes and urged Para to go for it. Para brought the bottle down with some trepidation.

"Is dat der best yer can do?" demanded Sweat.

"What if I break it?" replied Para.

"Den I'll have a couple o' months off won't I," said Sweat calmly.

"I meant the bottle," said Para.

"Will ye get on wi de fookin ting," demanded Sweat, spreading his hand on the table. Para's next attempt brought the bottle down with a force that made the table shudder. Sweat grimaced, raised his head to the heavens and swore loudly, beads of more sweat than usual appearing on his brow.

"A little harder," said Sweat through clenched teeth. BANG! Another blow again caused the table to shudder. Sweat swore again, a little louder than last time, then looking at his thumb, said "dat might have done it," and refused the offer of another bash from Para, who seemed to be enjoying it now.

"Its gone numb anyway," said Sweat, looking at it carefully.

"Along with your brain," I remarked. A final blow from Para was agreed upon, which seemed to achieve the desired result and after more swearing and the final dispatch of his ale, Sweat looked at the now swollen thumb with satisfaction.

"You shall go the ball, Sweaterella," he said to himself, now fully satisfied. I should add, that all this lunacy was interspersed with peals of laughter, even Sweat was laughing, despite the pain, and all this time the mystified landlord was looking on bemused at the unfolding of this alien, apparently masochistic rite. He would have been even more mystified had he known the real reason.

CHAPTER TEN

In the spring of 81 and having failed to get a better position with AFRC, I was back in Calella. This time I had arrived in a camper van driven by Pete, the American barman from the 'Grill', who had decided to take a trip down to southern Spain and was eager for company. We travelled via Switzerland, France and Andorra in the Pyrenees, thankfully suffering none of the farcical events that had marked my previous trip in that region. When we had passed into Portugal I left them and set off for Calella in Spain.

During my first few days, I stayed as usual at the 'Trebol', where I discovered that during my absence the former owner, despot and hater of single-egg and chips had unsurprisingly suffered a premature death. Now, there was a noticeable lack of tension in that admirable restaurant. There was alas, no Henry. He had gone to wait tables elsewhere, having quit the employ of our single-egg hating owner.

"Ee wos a tipico Catalan," said Henry some years later. "Beesness fuckin beesness, he ees better, fuckin' dead."

I went up the stairs to my room, savouring the usual fragrance that lingered along the corridors, content with the ease of returning to an old familiar haunt. It's nature's little gift to one's past, that aromas, like the playing of old pop records, can send you spinning back into some distant moment in time, the disinfectant or something that the cleaners use for the rooms in the Trebol, acted like a trigger to my nostalgia and the times when I have been back contain that same clean, sweetish smell, rolling back the years and evoking those first days, years ago. There had been a two and a half year interval since my last visit, and in that time there had mushroomed several new hotels and bars on the newer side of town. The old part wherein lay the 'Nags' and several other bars were left vying for the decreasing custom as the 'new' Calella exerted its appeal to the travel agents. Math, too, had not been slow to take advantage of these new developments, and now had a pub in that area, 'The Talk of the Town'. A title I thought a little grand, apart from being a downright lie. I would have much preferred the name that Dinah, his wife, had suggested 'Brahms & Lyst'. Although that cockney rhyming slang may have proved puzzling to any German or Hungarian tourists. The 'Talk' was quite an attractive pub, but lacked character and bore no comparison to the 'Nags'. There was nothing that singled it out from hundreds of other pubs. There were no orange trees in a quaint garden, no upstairs balcony supported by round, knotty and varnished beams, while the record turntable looked almost new! Although the pub lacked character we were a good-humoured staff led by Maths' dry and dead-pan variety, of which he was a master.

When in the street, heads would always turn to look at him as he was a striking looking man, with his height, athletic build and the grey mop of hair and moustache. He was not unaware of this, and I remember him exploiting it one night, just for fun: He entered to take up his

duties, and with his back turned to the dozen or so customers, he engaged Sandra and I in a conversation that was purposely banal, while slowly taking off his jumper. Folding it once with uncommon care, he then again slowly folded it with an exaggerated aligning of sleeves, this was followed by a further painstaking fold, then by a press with his hand to smooth it down; all this taking a good five minutes. Suddenly, he grasped the neat bundle and threw it over the curtain, behind which the beer barrels were stored. Sandra's mouth dropped, and began to look at the onlooking audience.

"No don't look," said Math, "it spoils it."

And again, when my friend Martin working for a short time in the Nags, was asked by Math to employ his bricklaying skills in repairing the pot-holed garden bar floor. Math brought in the required cement and lime and dropped them at Martin's feet as we were taking a break from morning cleaning.

"Right then Martin, said Math, "I'm off to the beach, I'll see you later," and turned on his heel.

"Er, Math," called Martin, "where do I get the sand?" Math turned and looked hard at him for a few seconds, then, making an exaggerated shrug of his shoulders, turned, and walked away. Said Martin later, "It took me a full half minute before I comprehended, and realised that he'd done it again!"

Most of the British employees in the bars were working illegally, and I suppose, most of the Dutch and Germans too. Some of the Dutch would even be signing on the dole - they signed on once a month - and would spend a day driving back to Holland to append their signature to some document then drive back, bringing with them with a fresh supply of cannabis or 'grass'. I would certainly have liked to have been made legal, but the province of Barcelona would offer only so many work permits, besides, I was only one of many working 'black' as it was cheaper for the employers, although it was a bit of a hassle to watch for the police while handing out cards, or serving behind a bar, where any policeman or even worse, the dreaded Guardia Civil in their tri-cornered hats, could demand to see one's permit. The fact that there were rare occurrences of people being caught working illegally were due to several factors: complacency on the part of the local police who wished only for a quiet life; a wish by the authorities to maintain the status quo, knowing full well that many people were working illegally, but turning a blind eye to such things as long as the wheels of tourism were turning easily; and the knowledge that it would be impossible to order foreign bars to employ Spanish people only, as it was desirable by the bar owner that people spoke the appropriate language, and not enough Spanish people did; at least not in the way a fluent speaker of the language could. I could not for example see any Spaniard trying to understand the three drunken Durham men I travelled with on the boat from Hull, they would have been totally baffled. It was always very pleasing that when I was in conversation with foreign friends, the lingua franca was English. I have been at the same table with Dutch, Spanish, Danish and German

friends, all speaking English in a delightful melange of accents, but intelligible. It seemed a paradox that I would sometimes have more trouble understanding my Scots or Geordie colleagues.

A novel system of working in the new pub, was that I would work alternate day and night shifts, meaning I had a night off every other day. This meant I could tour round the other pubs, often in the company of Jose, a Spanish friend who lived some miles outside of Calella, but came into town to stay with his cousin, who worked for Eddie and who he called Primo, which in Spanish can mean either cousin or idiot. I never knew which meaning Jose had in mind. Jose liked to drink. In fact he drank like there was no tomorrow, and was the only Spaniard I knew that drank more than the holidaying Brits. We would tour round most of the British bars, where he would contrive to get as much beer and other concoctions down him in a short a time as possible while fruitlessly chatting up females, this often resulting in him being carried home, legless. After two or three days of this I wouldn't see him for another two weeks, before he got more time off work - he was an air-traffic controller at Barcelona airport!

My shift pattern meant that I could do the round of the Brit pubs. No one else had the luxury of seeing their colleagues desperately trying to maintain the atmosphere necessary to keep the punters happy. This forced attempt at perpetual bonhomie necessitated frequent libations, but as free drinks were part of the contract - in fact you were encouraged to drink as long as it never impaired efficiency - it was a painless and pleasurable pastime. Like spüling in a German hotel kitchen, the conditions in these 'fun pubs' were noisy, hot and frenetic, and lively and invigorating as the work could be, it was difficult to maintain this rapport with the punters seven nights a week for a whole season without stimulant of some kind, and would be an impossible task to perform, sober. It was fascinating to observe the methods used by my fellow workers to attract clientele: the Scots lads outside the 'Rabbie Burns', would don the kilt in order to entice the passing punters inside; Ross, having a huge black dildo tied under his, which he would flash at selected females. The Spanish lads outside their disco's, who would only give free entrance to females they fancied, signing their 'prop' cards with their name. "Free dreenk for you if you come eenside."

My nights off would always start with dinner at 8pm. This was quite early by Spanish standards, and was something I took seriously. I love eating in restaurants, especially foreign food, and especially when abroad. Choosing such a place when wishing to eat 'native' it is worth noting where the locals eat, and worth trying to learn what the menus mean. Some less authentic Spanish looking places with signs in English are best avoided. Especially those where the spelling or phrasing is less than certain; once observing one restaurant in Lloret that had a sign: 'This is Pepe's and you are welcome to it'. I like everything connected with the ritual of eating, considering like many continentals and unlike many British and Germans who

consider it a necessary chore, that food is not just to sustain life but a civilised act of self-indulgence, and one to be pursued as far as your budget allows. Conducted properly it should be a feast not just for the taste buds, but also to allow the sounds and sights of the foreign words to invoke in the mind an anticipation of what is to come. Then, when the meal is brought to the table, to savour the fare with your eyes, while allowing the aroma to capture your senses. I am always of the view that the names of meals in a romance language like French or Spanish, always look and sound far more sophisticated and delectable than they do when conducted in our own language. Does not 'Pommes Frites avec Poisson' sound better than fish and chips? and 'Bocadillo de Jamon' better than a ham sandwich? But then many names sound better when spoken in other than a Germanic language. Guiseppe Verdi sounding far more mellifluous than Joe Green.

Eddie was still here, although he had changed pubs and was now at the 'Apples and Pears'. When I had finished my meal I would go and see what he was up to, never missing an opportunity to listen to his 'spiel' with the punters. He was still insulting them, and they still loved it. He was still frightened of his heart giving out, still trying to give up smoking and cutting down on the drink, and as usual ending in failure. I remember he was walking along the street one day and in a bit of a hurry, while fiddling with the tobacco in his pouch and the flimsy roll-up papers in an unsuccessful attempt to roll a cigarette at the same time. Exasperated, he suddenly threw the tobacco pouch in the air saying loudly: "fuck the smoking." The pouch never came down. It had landed on one of the low roofs of the adjacent houses. He looked up, realised what had happened and shrugged it off.' It was only later, after being seduced into a good beer-drinking session, and when he tried to get back in his flat, that he realised his door and car-keys were also in the pouch. Also, he couldn't remember which street it was, and had to delay the opening of the pub that night and wait while his employees turned up, before forming an expedition where the young lads were hoisted up drain pipes of likely looking houses, much to the bemusement of the locals.

Dave, Gary and Algy hadn't returned to Calella that year and I had sorely missed them and their humour. I even missed Pluto who hadn't returned either, and one day I happened to notice in the 'Nags library', that the 'Glass Key' was still there. It was now tattered, torn and beerstained. Thinking of Pluto I picked it up and flicked through the pages. I was tempted to start reading it but stopped, I may have found that I liked it so put it down, allowing it to remain in my mind as 'fuckin' rubbish.'

The old part of town was slowly dying, and along with it much of the the old camaraderie that had prevailed. More competition had the bar owners fighting to keep the dwindling tourists there. I think there were one or two excursions to restaurants for someone's birthday, but the spontaneity that caused us to party for little or no reason had diminished; although we did manage to rustle up enough enthusiasm for

one barbecue as of old, and in October after having a bit of a goodbye party in the Nags, I left, doubting if I would return - at least to work. The allure of the resort had faded. The booming development of hotels, apartments and new businesses of every description, had turned what was a quaint resort in the sixties, a small, growing but still intimate resort in the seventies, into the mire of brash and greedy development typified by much of coastal Spain. In any case my second home had now been usurped by Garmisch; but even there, matters would be eventually overtaken by unforeseen circumstances.

As I said my goodbyes, little did I know that I would never see Math and Eddie again, both dying of heart attacks some years later. Math while playing tennis, and Eddie collapsing not long after leaving the doctor's surgery - the doctor having just told him that he was fine - his worries about his heart being finally and cruelly realised.

With their passing, the spirit of the British community in Calella took a blow that left it much the poorer, and it is a tribute to their personalities, that people still talk of them with that reverence and affection reserved only for the loved and respected. The Trebol had offered Steak 'John' and Steak 'Eddie' on the English menu well before their untimely deaths, - a tribute not afforded to many by a restaurant - and in a maudlin moment I regarded it as their 'corner of some foreign field', having the whimsical thought that perhaps when I finally pass over, I may have the honour bestowed on me: Egg and Chips 'Pete' - with just the ONE egg.

Some years later while on holiday, I walked down the Calle General Mola that was now Calle Amadeu, typifying the end of the Franco era and the upsurge of Catalan independence. The 'Nags' had been converted, and what had been the front bar was now a small picture gallery, opening into, I think, a co-operative. I looked across at the old familiar building and felt a great sadness as the memories came flooding back. The bars on the window reminding me of Martin, who having put them in, said on completion, "I'm the only person to have barred Math." And the happy times it had given me and the people I had met, the conversations with Math and Eddie, the 'crack' with the punters. I had to turn away before the ghosts got too deep into my spirit. To tourists it was just a pub, to the people who knew it well it was a second home and a meeting place. For me it was the start of something new and exciting, something that I would never experience again, but would always remain with me.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the autumn of 83 I was once more in Garmisch. This time as a fully trained sports-turf greenkeeper, having taken a nine month course at a college near York, during which time my mind kept returning to that mountain retreat. It was like a magnet that kept on exercising its attraction, and like iron filings I was drawn irresistibly to it, and left once more, shortly after finishing the course.

My first two weeks I spent dossing with Keith in his apartment. He was still tour guide and taking Americans to the Neuschwanstein and Linderhof palaces of King Ludwig 2. I somewhat envied his job going to these fabulous places every day, but I don't think I could have handled the tourist spiel. Keith was blessed in that department in that he loved his work and could talk the hind leg off a donkey. He also looked like the late King! The only problem with returning to work for AFRC was that one had to work in a lowly position for three months before applying for the better jobs, so despite my previous promise to myself, I was a spüler again, although this time it was in an American hotel, The General Patton, a hotel reserved for officers. The manageress was Frau Surmon, a grim-faced figure who dressed predominately in black. She would have made an excellent camp commandant at Ravensbruck, and rumour had it that she used to go to Dachau for her holidays. She would have made a perfect spouse for Herr Maier, my former landlord, flitting about the hotel like Mrs Danvers in 'Rebecca', only lacking the candelabra. She spoke to me only once. It was when all the silverware became tarnished due to my pouring floor cleaner instead of washing-up liquid into the dish washer. In company with her assistant Mr Pieri, an Italian with a drinker's complexion, she berated me for the mistake, while I blamed it on my ignorance of the German language. "Disgusting," she hissed, giving me a final glare of contempt before gliding away. We were bitter enemies from that day.

There was as usual the kitchen idiot: Yusof was probably in his mid-50s and generally thought of as a Turk, but the curious thing was, not even the Turks spoke to him. Phenol voiced the opinion that he was from the wilds of Turkey and was a Kurd. He was well over six feet tall, with a large, eagle-beaked nose, upon which perched small round-framed spectacles and was, with the exception of Eli, the most cadaverous looking human I had ever seen. I had seen photographs of the mummified remains of King Rameses 2nd of ancient Egypt after he had been stripped of his bandages after some 4,000 years. He could have been Yusof's twin brother - except that Rameses looked far the healthier.

He had worked in the hotel for many years. One day while he was scraping the left-over contents of the plates into the evil smelling waste bin, I asked him, in German, how many years he had worked there. His mouth slowly formed what was the nearest approximation to a smile he could manage, this revealed a distasteful array of green and

nicotine-stained broken teeth. It was like looking over the wall of an old cemetery. Extending a bony, equally nicotined finger he wrote in a plate of congealed gravy, the number 32. It was a long time to work in a country that regarded Turks with the same affection that an Iranian Mullah has for Salman Rushdie. The fact that he was also a spüler made him even more of a pariah, but he was a good worker and the kitchen staff was the nearest thing to a family, thus he tolerated the job with a completely serene and utter detachment, and with a demeanor that was completely unattainable by we mere 'dilettantes' of the spüling profession.

Spüling, as you will understand from my earlier remarks, is a task that persons who have any intelligence and with any iota of aspiration can undertake for only so long. How Yusof had managed to stay in the same place washing dishes for all those years can only make one wonder at the infinite capacity of some people to keep their brains on hold until they die. His bank balance must have far outweighed his intelligence. He stayed at the hotel in staff quarters, which in 1983 would only have cost him about £20 a month including heating and lighting, and never went anywhere that cost money, normally haunting the streets of Garmisch dressed in a long mac and carrying an umbrella - even in summer. He ate his main meals at the hotel, thus obviating the purchase of provisions from any store, and due to the 'step increases' that the Ministry of Defence paid to its employees, his wages must have been more than adequate for him. Every year after the first two years, the wage of any local national who worked for the German Ministry of Defence - who was our paymaster, despite being employed by an American organisation - was boosted by a step increase, meaning perhaps another DM100-200 a year on one's salary depending on their job. These step increases went up to about 13 steps. Then after, there were other long service increments. After thirty two years, Yusof must have been the highest paid spüler in the world! Many Greeks and Turks lived similarly frugal lives, saving up their money for twenty years or so before going back to their homeland and buying a business. Yusof I don't think had a home. Nobody really knew, as he never spoke to anyone!

It was at first, a source of irritation to me why people should choose to live in such a niggardly fashion for so long, but then it gradually occurred to me that many of these people were from an environment that had never known the luxury of a decent wage now afforded them by their work in Germany. This was their promised land, and their exodus meant their descendants could live a life denied them in their homeland. This was apt to be overlooked by many backpackers from the USA and Britain who, being young and only playing at life, at first tended to look down their noses at them, until, having travelled to Greece or Turkey, came back singing the praises of that land and remarking on the hospitality of their citizens; although I speak of the country people rather than their brethren in the cities. It is curious, that while the Turks are generally disliked by the Germans, the Greeks are tolerated. Perhaps it is due to Greece being regarded as the

birthplace of democracy, and a land from where sprang mighty and mythical warriors akin to the Teutonic Gods. Hitler himself, in one of his eccentric flights of fancy had allied the German race with this warrior ethos of the early Greeks, thus bestowing on them a certain 'street cred'. Many German people also enjoyed cheap and good holidays in Greece, the Deutschmark being welcomed with open arms by the descendants of the Gods, while Turkey had not yet found a niche in the tourist trade.

It was about that time that we held what was known as a spülers' convention. It was really just an excuse for a 'session' but sounded a good idea, and spülers past and present were invited to attend the Katheriner Keller one certain day at 8pm. The keller was a downstairs bar in the Katheriner Hof hotel, a small family-owned establishment amiably run by Otto, a youthful looking man in his late forties. The keller had no special attraction except for some taped Bavarian melodies and popular tunes. Its raison d'etre seemed merely to provide Otto with something to do, while mopping up all the British and American detritus of the other bars when they had closed. Not many Germans attended the place, given that it was full of noisy, English-speaking drunks. Otto was remarkably tolerant given the events that often occurred; although the keller was below street level and back from the road, where any shouts or screaming would not be transmitted up to the outside world and thus ideal for the clientele that usually assembled there.

Sweat and I were in the keller one night and deep in conversation, well, as deep as one could get in conversation with Sweat. I was facing him with my back turned to the far end of the room, which had for some reason, window-like openings that gave out only to a blank outer wall, with a gap of a foot or so in between. Suddenly, halting his conversation he stiffened, and looking at the back of the room raised a finger, saying: "will yer look at dat." I turned around to see Seamus's brother, Hughie, standing and swaying on the wooden ledge above the seats and with one of the openings ajar, urinating onto the outside wall and down the gap. The bar was almost full and Otto was stood below him. Showing the measure of the man he waited patiently for Hughie to finish, before helping him down and to his seat, all without a word of reproach, only a sad shake of the head registering his disapproval.

On the night of the convention few people were there at the elected time, they just turned up at periodic intervals and in various degrees of intemperance, and by the time that the chairman, who revelled in the glorious name of 'Jeff Bollocks', declared the convention open, it was almost 10pm. Eventually around twenty people gathered, all spülers at one time or another and many of whom had equally delightful Runyonesque nicknames such as 'Psycho' Al, 'Coma' Steve and 'Dim' Tim. Many spüling stories were told and the prize of a crate of beer was awarded to the best one. There was a good case made for the story of two waiters at the German, 'Post Hotel', who were apparently caught

in a homosexual act, but this was only a second-hand tale and thus could not be corroborated. It was also thought a little spurious as the supposed act was taking place in the large, refrigerated, perishable-goods storeroom. This revelation naturally invoked vulgar and well-worn references to 'well-hung meat', and having 'something cool to slip into' but, after all the other tales had been related, the award was awarded to Sweat. No-one it seemed, could match the knocking-off-of-the-chef's-hat episode, while Jeff was voted 'spüler of the year' and 'Coma' Steve most promising newcomer. Sweat also securing the prestigious lifetime's award of an honorary plate for services to the spüling trade. I almost won the 'cock-up' of the year award for my floor cleaner-in-the-dishwasher tale, but was outvoted in favour of 'Dim' Tim's contribution: It seemed that the hotel he was working in was running out of snail shells, and the chef, whose responsibility it was to stuff them with tinned snails and garlic butter, was at a loss as to where they were disappearing, none of the shells finding their way back to their designated space in the kitchen. After interrogation by the head chef, it was found that Tim had thought them of no consequence and was keeping them to decorate the window sill. Jeff said that my tale would normally have won, but Tim's was so pathetic that it deserved recognition of some kind. It was decreed by Jeff, that a spüler's club tie would be made and asked for suggested designs. After much discussion, the concensus was that the tie, coloured dishwater grey, would depict a cracked and greasy plate with knife and fork rampant. Resolutions were also made which would demand employees to scrap the present ceramic dishes and silverware and replace them with disposable paper plates and plastic cutlery, free beer for spülers only and waitresses to be topless. It was also thought that with the modern penchant for grander titles, such as 'fluologist' instead of chimney sweep, that a request to management would be made that the present title of 'spüler' - now used by the Germans as a term of contempt, be upgraded to 'ceramic technician'.

Jeff finally wound up the proceedings by standing unsteadily on his chair and almost overcome with maudlin emotion, declared the gathering to have been a huge success; thanked all present; gave thanks to previous spülers who had fought so hard for their right to have beer machines near their places of work; and then bowing his head, gave thanks to spülers who had died in the line of duty, which was a little mystifying but no-one felt like contradicting him, finalising his address with the rallying cry of: "united we spüle, divided we fall," and thrust a clenched fist to the ceiling, à la Black Power, whereupon he promptly fell off the chair, collapsing in a drunken heap on the floor. That first meeting of the Garmisch spüler's convention ended around 2am. It had also been proposed that one be held every year, but it has never materialised, and I suspect would never equal the inaugural event.

By now I was working my notice and with the onset of winter, thinking of travelling to warmer climes. Spüling was numbing my brain, affecting my innate good nature and causing me to drink even more than

normal. I then happened to meet up with a good friend of mine, 'Scottish Mary' a friend, who I knew from 75. At that time she was a humble chambermaid but now happened to be secretary at the Hausberg ski-lodge. I mentioned to her that spüling was once again driving me crazy and could not get a decent job anywhere else, and that I had put in my notice. She immediately told me that she would use her influence to get me a job - if I wanted. I did want. I wasn't that financially sound and didn't really want to leave Garmisch at that time so it was that I was persuaded to hang around for an interview.

Since his drunken collapse, Jeff Bollocks had stopped drinking for a while, compelling Sweat to make the sage observation that "he must be in a hell of a state to abstain from alcohol," adding, "even when I was a baby I wouldn't take mi bottle unless dey slapped a Guinness label on it."

"No wonder you're fucking daft," said 'Para." This, from a man who on a particular Saturday morning and in a snowstorm, was seen by me hauling a sledge laden down with empty beer crates to the supermarket a mile away, in order to ensure he had enough beer to keep him going for the weekend.

"I wouldn't say dat," said Sweat, with an injured expression, I've just a few brain cells that haven't recovered as yet." In truth, Sweat was a lot brighter than given credit for, being a whiz at scrabble, it was just his Irish logic which I'm sure he embellished, that fooled people. In all truth I have never met a stupid Irishman yet. It's just a myth perpetuated by the English; for as far as I had gleaned, the Irish have a better education system and an overabundance of intellectuals in the arts: to my mind a more accurate reflection of intelligence than the memorising of dry scientific facts. Sweat remarking once, that 'the greatest inventor in de world must have been Irish: "Have yez never heard o' Pat Pending."

We were both walking up to the 'Chance' in Zugspitze Strasse one day when an American tourist overhearing our British accents, asked how best to get to Mittenwald. Before I could open my mouth Sweat pointed in the general direction, "it's dat way." then, "are yez going by car?"

"Yes," said the man, pointing to an expensive looking sports car. "How far is it to Mittenwald anyway?"

"Well, I think it's about thirty miles," I replied. Sweat eyed up the sports car. "Maybe only twenty in a car like dat." When in the 'Chance', Sweat debated with the table of regulars what to buy his girlfriend, Maxine, for a birthday present.

"Buy her a book," said one.

"Nooo," said Sweat with a shake of his head, "she's already got one."

Due to Mary's influence I duly obtained the job of 'Recreational Aide' at the Hausberg ski-lodge. It was located at the foot of the Hausberg mountain and adjacent to a small hill, which had at the side a tow-bar to enable learner skiers and kids to practise. The building itself was a draughty, wooden affair built in the early fifties, but its

dilapidated appearance belied the fact that it was, in terms of the number of skis available, the largest in Europe, having some 1000 pairs if needed.

It comprised of a reception area staffed at the height of the season by three or four people who scrutinised I D cards and wrote on a duplicated pad the requirements of the skier: boots, skis and clothing. This section gave onto the issuing area then through swing doors to the toilets, proceeding onto the dining section and bar. The manager was Gordon, a grey-haired American in his sixties who spent most of his time in the bar, leaving the running of the place to Bob, a small and portly man with a gruff exterior that disguised a dry wit and a gentle personality. He would in turn leave much of the smooth running of the place to Mary who, having all this chain of command heaped upon her was well nigh indispensable.

My job was in the ski-issue section, where I had the wearying task of asking each customer their weight and what proficiency they had obtained in order to adjust their skis to the correct tension. Many of the obese, American, female, military dependents tended to lie about their weight, and it was a standing joke among the British workers that many of these ladies suffered from what we unkindly called, A B D - American Butt Disease.

It was under the influence of that particular environment that I decided to try skiing. Not however, downhill! I still considered that as a sport for posers. No! I thought that cross-country skiing was the one that bore the most resemblance to the original aim: getting from A to B in the quickest and most efficient way over terrain that would normally prove un-negotiable. Was not that how the sport had developed in the first place? Nowadays, though, it has taken on another mantle: for the modern, trendy and fashionable set to show off the latest in fashion.

As an employee I could borrow skis for free, and during my two hour lunch break I would set off across the snow-covered fields in order to dine at the pub that lay some two miles away. When I started the pursuit I soon realised there is a lot more to it than I thought. For a start it used muscles that had long remained dormant, secondly, there is a technique to it, one which I unfortunately never really mastered. There were even different waxes for various snow conditions if you wanted to get really technical, but to have to stop at some incline that approached a bridge over a small brook and sidestep up proved embarrassing at first, as seventy year old women glided over the rise as though borne on a cushion of air. I consoled myself with the fact that they had been brought up to this activity since they were kids, not only as a sport but as a necessary means of locomotion. There are machines now to duplicate these skiing actions, but are no substitute for the real thing, with the soft swish of the ski's on the packed snow; a glorious, crisp sunny day; pristine mountain air; the glorious snow-laden mountains as a backdrop, and a foaming glass

of weizen beer in the gasthaus awaiting me.

Like the British 'squaddies', the American GI's and their dependents are not an accurate reflection of the American nation. The American civilians were different, and I only met two Americans who were as upright as some of their military employers. A couple who worked together at a restaurant, used to count every penny, never socialised and were never as happy as when they were miserable. My theory was that they were frightened to enjoy themselves for fear they might find it fun and realise what they had been missing all this time. They used to say that they were saving to go somewhere. But what, I used to wonder, was the purpose of being in a foreign land if they denied themselves the pleasures of meeting and talking with people? Which essentially is the essence of travelling - in whatever country one happens to be.

These two apart, the rest of the American civilians I found were kind, generous and fun to be with, their love of outdoor pursuits and masters of barbecues, certainly influenced many Britishers, many of the younger ones - unlike most of the Brits - were only taking a break from further studies at college before going on to improve themselves, an ambition which most of the Brits seemed to lack, as many of them seeming to have achieved their ambition in just leaving Britain.

The main difference between the British and Americans, apart from the Americans' brashness, competitiveness and comparative lack of cynicism, sometimes allied to an endearing naivety, is the humour and their apparent superficiality, although I would rather be told to 'have a nice day' by someone who doesn't mean it, than be told to 'fuck off' by someone who does. Their patriotism is also far more in evidence: The American anthem was always played in the old American cinema before the film started, while flashes of the stunning and rugged grandeur of their homeland was displayed on the screen, beneath a super-imposed and fluttering 'Old Glory', at which one was obliged to stand. Such overt acts of the same patriotism in England would mark you out as a member of the National Front!

British humour often relies much on word-play, a game which involves a subtlety that the Americans in general. perhaps due to their comparatively short history, seem not to have developed to the same high degree. Seamus once being accosted in a hotel by an American G I dealing in drugs. The G I beckoned him over and after furtively looking right and left, whispered swiftly to him, "Joints, Crack?" "Aye, well, you should see an osteopath then," was the swift reply to the baffled dope peddler.

I like eccentrics. People who do things in a different way. Not because they try to prove a point or make a statement, but who do a particular thing that way because it is part of their make-up. Bill was such a person. He was a plump, bald-headed black guy from New Jersey, or 'Joysey' as he would say. He said he was sixty two years old, but was

believed to be some five years older. Whenever he or someone else would say something that he thought funny, he would laugh a deep-throated chuckle, that would make his rotund frame shake, while his eyes would laugh with the rest of his body as though he had said or heard the funniest thing in years. He was a big, black, cuddly teddy bear and it would be a hard person who could dislike him. He didn't drink or smoke, and never swore, but was not sanctimonious, often making mild, sexual innuendos to the girls that were funny and tolerated because they came from Bill, while possessing an accent and delivery that stereotyped the American negro. It was comical, and reminded me of the old 50s American T V show, Amos n' Andy.

Some years earlier he had been golf pro then later, manager of the golf course. This was however only for a brief period before they found out how incompetent he was. He had since then worked his way down to his present position, issuing ski boots, and ever since then he had tried to get financial reimbursement for this perceived injustice by writing to every brass-hat in the American army and petitioning every new commander in AFRC for a review of his case whenever time allowed, as he scoured every nook and cranny for bits of old junk to cobble something together rather than pay out any money, his parsimony being the only fault I could find with him. The management steered clear of him whenever possible, regarding him as an amiable bufoon. He had however the perfect requisite for his present job, a calm demeanor allied to infinite patience.

Anyone who has worked in a shoe store will know how difficult it can be to satisfy certain customers with footwear, and this is especially true of learner skiers, and especially so of some ladies. I like women for a host of reasons, but they do appear when it comes to shopping and trying-on-of-shoes in particular, to possess to an unnerving degree a temperament by which the normal processes of time seem temporarily suspended, until they have achieved that magic blend of style and fit: At the start of every season and on the pretence of explaining the theory and practise of the ski lodge, Bob would seat himself at the reception desk to regale new employees and old hands alike, with tales of customer idiosyncracies. Like Eddie and Algy in Calella, he had a gift for the telling of tales. In his high-pitched voice and comically dry way, he would relate the time he had to step in for Bill while serving ski boots to a first time, middle-aged skier:

"She went from a size 8 to a goddam 5 before settling for a size 7," he said. "And when I did finally find a pair that fitted, she wanted another goddam style. And when I found another style, it turned out she had signed up for goddam cross-country skis! Took hour n' half to fit the crazy bitch!" It seemed that Bob hadn't noticed that the issue slip stated that she wanted cross country ski's, which of course required a different type of boot altogether. Said Bob, "I had to start that damn shit all over again." When one considers that at the height of the season and on 'ski-weeks' - a special package for learner skiers, who turned up from about three o' clock onwards every Saturday - between five and seven hundred ski boots and skis could be issued

in the space of four hours, it can be seen that it only takes a few persons like that legendary lady to gum up the works. Bill however, could spend a good half hour with one person, helping them with their fittings, while I in contrast, dished them out with gay abandon saying: "well, if you have problems bring them back," which they did with regular monotony, but at least it eased the pressure. It was a job that accurately bore analogy with a major war: long bouts of boredom interspersed with violent bursts of activity. In these bouts of boredom I would sometimes wander into the restaurant to chat with the staff there. As staff members we paid half price for food, which was in the main the usual American fast food fare, Hamburgers, hotdogs, pancakes, chilli etc and a curious hybrid, 'chilli-dog', a hotdog smothered in chilli sauce. Bill declined to eat any of 'that crud,' and would bring his own food and drink:

I was at the boot counter one day, chatting idly with him as he spooned a dark powder into a cup from a green tin. "What's that Bill?" I asked. "Gunpowder tea, it blows your socks awf," he replied, giving his deep chuckle. I should add that Bill was wont to try weird foodstuffs he obtained from the commissary. The week before he was eating some Korean concoction with a revolting odour, hardly suprising, given that it was cabbage that had been allowed to ferment. He called it kimchi and said it was what he ate during the Korean war.

"Are you still eating the Kimchi, Bill?" I asked.

"Sure am Pete, keeps me sexually active, know what ah mean, eh, eh, eh," He then went to put some hot water in his 2nd cup of gunpowder tea. When he returned, I went to the restaurant to talk with Jamie, an American colleague. I was keeping an eye on the issue department through the glass doors when I saw Bill scurry from out of the boot section to dive into the toilet. I never gave it a moment's thought, except for wondering why he was moving so unusually fast, and twenty minutes later I was back in the boot section when Bill came limping back. "You've been gone a long time Bill," I remarked casually. He leaned forward on the counter and looked at me while emitting his low chuckle.

"Yer know Pete, dat gunpowder tea, eh, eh, eh, it not only blows your socks awf, it blows yer drawers awf too, eh eh eh." It was a few seconds before I fully comprehended the statement before busting out laughing. I never did ask him what he did with his drawers.

He drove a camper van that he had been trying to get rid of for at least a year. Now normally, most sane people would simply put a simple notice in the window saying: FOR SALE a brief description and the price. Not Bill. There were five different rhyiming couplets advertising its qualities: "BUY THE LEAN GREEN MEAN MACHINE"; "DON'T PASS BY IT TILL YOU TRY IT"; "IT'S GOT MORE THAN YOU THINK, EVEN A SINK"; "IF YOU THINK IT'S NICE ASK THE PRICE". And a classic: "IF YOU'RE GOING TO PLACES THAT'S REMOTEST, BUY THE ONE THAT'S GOT THE MOSTEST".

Like Sweat, he had a curious logic that confounded orthodoxy but was

a person worth knowing simply for being himself, and like Sweat he had no pretensions to be anywhere or anything but where and what he was at that time, making the best in his own bumbling way of everything that life threw at him. A young English girl once said to me: "I don't know how he gets through life?" This girl was about 25 years of age. I said nothing at the time, but could perhaps have pointed out that he was a decorated soldier in two wars and had at one time been a golf pro, which for a black person even now is not that common, and had also been a manager of the golf course and was liked by everyone. Furthermore, should she achieve his age and be held with the same amount of affection she would have done remarkably well. He was a character in a world that needs more characters, one of the people who refuse - consciously or not - to take life seriously, and can, perhaps at the expense of a little superficial dignity, laugh at themselves.

I was approaching the end of my first year at the ski-lodge, when I took a two week holiday before starting at the golf course in May. I went to Mallorca. I chose there because though only April I thought it would be warm, and I wanted to see Paddy. I hadn't seen him for eight years, but knew he had at that time a pub and restaurant there. I sat down in the plush travel agents, looking at the posters with their evocative portrayals of life in foreign lands. My eyes stumbled on the one depicting the Pyramids of Egypt that was hung on the wall, and behind the pretty, blonde fraulein busily typing away. My mind wandered back:

XX

It was 1979, and my friend Gig and I were in Cairo. We were in the closing stages of our bicycle trip that had started in Yorkshire a month earlier. It had been by any standards an uneventful trip so far, with not even a puncture to upset our rythm, although I must be honest in declaring that this was mainly due to colluding with other forms of transport.

At Cairo airport as we were waiting in line at the customs, I could hear the official asking those in front where they would be staying? I confess I hadn't given a thought to it, and less that anyone would need to know. A young woman in front overhearing our apparent helplessness, told us to 'say: 'The Golden Hotel' at Talat Haarb street.' We did. What's more we stayed there. I was impressed by the owner, an eighty year old, impecabbly dressed man who possessed a perfectly modulated and upper class English accent, "I was at Oxford in the twenties." He spoke of England with deep affection - a clear sign that he hadn't been back since. We elected to stay in a room, although we could have stayed in a dormitory for almost half the price, but with the gay, recklessness of youth decided to splash out and pay the £1-50p a night.

The previous night we had stayed in a suburb of Cairo, Heliopolis,

which was in fact far older than Cairo, and once the seat of a powerful priesthood who were custodians of Ra the sun god. After pedalling our bicycles furiously from the airport and through the mayhem of Egyptian traffic, we chose to stay in the large Heliopolis Hotel for the night. I think we paid around £4 for the room, which was situated on the fourth floor. Despite our initial protestations, the bent and wizened porter with a butt of a cigarette dangling from his lips, would insist on taking our pannier bags up. They were quite heavy, containing all our clothing, spares and spanners etc, which forced the old man to make two trips, re-appearing after the first one, wheezing, like an old organ with faulty pipes. Having secured our bicycles we followed him up the steps on his second trip. He was labouring under his burden, the sweat was beginning to appear on his brow and the old legs stumbled on the steps. Images of Christ carrying his cross to Golgotha suddenly and strangely sprang to mind.

"He'll never make it," I whispered to Gig. As if knowing what I had said, the old man made a slow turn and gave us a reassuring grin. "You know he'll expect a tip for this," said Gig as we followed the man into our room.

"Fear not for the contents of thy wallet my Yorkshire colleague," I intoned in my W C Fields voice, "we shall give him a reward only commensurate with his labour," meanwhile bringing out grubby Egyptian banknotes purchased at the airport, examining them, and trying to make rough calculations in my head. The old man entered the room, shrugged the panniers onto the floor and slowly creaked his way upright. He made to move for the door while giving a hopeful glance backwards. I beckoned him forward while brandishing the notes, whereupon his eyes took on a new and eager, pre pannier-toting lustre.

"There you are my good fellow, you may dine royally tonight," I intoned, again in my W C Fields voice, and handed him a note.

It was later that evening, after we had showered and dressed to go for dinner, that I finally worked out the currency.

"Gig," I said to my partly dressed companion, "I gave the old feller the wrong denomination note. Do you know how much we tipped him?"

"No, how much?" replied Gig in a concerned voice.

"About fivepence," I said. Gig started to titter.

"Fivepence - after all that climbing?"

"Yes", but even worse, it was fivepence in old money, two 'new' pence" referring to the pre and post-decimal currencies. This had us both in fits of laughter, conjuring up as it did, visions of the ancient porter dining royally on five old pence.

After we had been in Cairo a week and had seen the Pyramids, the Sphinx, and with a taxi driver guide, every mosque and every friend of his who had a tourist shop in the area, we decided to fly to Jordan - there being no legal passage between the countries at that time - then cycle into Israel, but before jetting off we decided to go to the Cairo museum:

It was quite an experience, filled as it is with ancient finds, the treasures of Tutankamun taking up a sizeable portion of space. We tagged on the back of a guided tour conducted in English, the young Egyptian girl telling us that no-one could understand why an insignificant king like 'Tut' was afforded so much luxury to speed him to the after-life. And luxury it was in terms of gold, precious stones and jewels. The gold mask of the boy-king is in itself worth the trip and we were almost alone in the part of the room where it was stored, free to gaze at our leisure. To imagine that such a beautiful creation was made of solid gold thousands of years ago left me in awe, and I was so glad that I saw it there rather than on the later display in Europe, where one would have had to queue and only get a glimpse of it.

The laxity displayed to their national treasures was quite suprising. I actually sat on a leather, fold-up divan of the boy-king's, an early type of camp-bed with leather hinges, with no-one to stop me, and when we approached a section that was roped-off and prohibited for repairs, the guards at their various posts would hiss like a tout on a street corner in England and jabber in Arabic something which I suppose meant, "ere mate, wanna see this," and hold out their hand for the tip.

These attempts to glean money from gullible tourists were not only restricted to the guards upstairs. About to leave the museum I decided that I would have to 'spend a penny' and entered the toilet on the first floor. I took no notice at first of the djellabah-clad Egyptian standing with a toilet roll outside the cubicles but then he hissed, "paper, you want paper." I nodded and took the proffered scraps and was about to enter the cubicle when he held out his hand saying: "money, I want money." I dismissed him with a wave of my hand and a muttered oath, entering the cubicle to sit giggling, as he hurled Arabic imprecations at me from outside. It would take more than ancient arabic curses to cause a Yorkshireman to part with his money for such a meagre return.

We finally made up our minds to book our flight to Jordan and were directed to the travel agents by our hotel owner. Upon arrival I thought there must be some mistake, this can't be the travel agents! In fact it looked like there was some kind of riot taking place. But, there it was, a sign in English: TRAVEL AGENTS alongside the Arabic that could just be seen above the jostling, yelling mob outside. Having no inclination to negotiate our way through such a crowd we returned to the hotel.

The following day the mob was still there, more restive and vocal than before. This was mystifying to say the least but we had to try to attract attention. Eventually we managed to struggle through the swaying djellaba's and through to the glass-fronted facade. A woman inside the agency noticing our alien figures beckoned us to the door, which was opened for us and shut immediately on our entering, while

frantic attempts were made to stop the rest of the screaming horde from following in our wake. We were motioned to sit as three women typed away while glancing nervously at the plate-glass front. Gig and I then began hazarding guesses at why there was such an explosion of interest in the travel agents. I whispered to him that there must be some special trips going, perhaps an off-peak excursion to Blackpool illuminations, when suddenly the glass started to bulge with the pressure of bodies, while the shouting turned to shrieks. The women suddenly ceased their typing and rose as one, picking up their machines and making hastily for some steps that led to an upper room, while a burly man rushed in from a back room armed with an iron bar, opened the door, which allowed two or three of the howling horde to enter, before driving the bar down on the bare feet of the unfortunates attempting to follow. Cries of pain now mingled with the general clamour, and we were ready to flee upstairs with the typists, all thoughts of a flight to Jordan temporarily suspended while I envisaged a rampaging mob ransacking the place as we were held hostage in exchange for a ticket to wherever.

Suddenly, the Cavalry, in the form of the police arrived and the crowd were sent packing with many a blow about the head. To this day I have no real idea where they wanted to go and indeed why they were so desperate to do so; except for the conclusion that if I were a peasant living in Cairo, I too would want to get out of the place as quick as possible.

xx

After my trip to Mallorca, I was into my new job on the golf course. I was quite looking forward to it, having all my newly acquired technical knowledge gained at the agricultural college still fresh in my mind. The golf course was a little out of Garmisch, on the border of the next village. A road divided two of the greens from the main body of the course, and overlooking them was the ruins of an old 12th century fortress, the 'Werdenfelser Ruins', that once acted as a watchtower against any unfriendly incursions into the district, and from which in the middle ages, toll fees were levied. It was a pretty course, with a decent surface of grass comparatively free of disease, and had the magnificent backdrop of the mountains on three sides. There were six of us to look after the nine hole course, which when you consider there are usually only four or five employees to an 18 hole course in Great Britain, is comparative bliss. But this was the American armed forces and nothing was spared, especially as the American and German taxpayer was paying the bill. I was often brought back to my times as a student greenkeeper where we were loaned out to the local golf courses in the North/West Yorkshire area for practical work. I was quite lucky, some of the tales the other students told were horrendous: Of slave-driving head greenkeepers, and golf courses where the staff were not allowed to enter the club premises, confined to their draughty huts and not even allowed in the club on their days off! It was like the old feudal system. Good old Merry

England! But here in Garmisch the American way prevailed, and I enjoyed my time there as the spring rains gave way to hot alpine summer days. My first job in the morning was to rake the bunkers. Not with rakes as in England, but with a machine. It was basically a small, fat-tired mini-tractor, with a serrated steel plate device attached to the rear that dropped down at the movement of a lever. It was great fun driving around in the morning sun, plunging into the sand and whizzing round the traps. It was in my opinion, too large a machine for these small bunkers, but I loved that task.

In dry, hot periods it was necessary to water the greens. This had to be done manually as we had not yet managed to acquire funds to install pop-up-sprinklers, and off I would go on one of the two small and indispensable three-wheeled, tip-up trucks that carried equipment, soil, fertilizer etc. It was on one of these times that I again fell prey to my Scorpio weakness for not easily forgetting a slight. I was parked in the shade of a small copse taking a drink away from the heat of the sun, when who should arrive on the tee only some ten yards away but my old boss from the Patton Hotel, Frau Surman. I knew that she occasionally played but this was the first time I had the chance to see her up close. She was alone and ignorant of my presence. I watched as she rested her bag at the side of the raised tee, pressed the tee peg into the ground, placed the ball upon it and pulled out of the bag what looked like a three wood. Then, as all good golfers should, she looked behind the ball envisaging what direction the ball should go. Having determined in her mind the intended flight, she addressed the ball. Her stance was relaxed but firm and looked good, her grip was as far as I could see, orthodox and correct. The only fault I could find was her stiffish, tweed clothing as it was quite warm. As she turned her body to initiate her backswing, I then decided it was time to go and turned the ignition key, pressing hard on the accelerator - just as she reached the point where her downswing commenced. I didn't actually see where the ball went but I heard it clatter into the far end of the copse. It must have taken ever so sharp a slice to end up there! Well, serves her right for wearing such restrictive clothing, it was bound to affect the swing! Later that day I was sat on my truck and parked near the clubhouse as she climbed into her car. At first she tried not to look, but I detected a sharp, laser-like glance. I smiled and nodded. To my surprise she smiled and nodded back, a slight and glacial upward curve of the lips with only the hint of a nod, but by that merest act of acknowledgement I divined that she knew who it was and why.

It was approaching the end of the golfing year in Garmisch. It had on the whole been a pleasant experience. All my work colleagues were decent people and of even temperament, with the exception of the head groundsman, an American of East European ancestry whom we all called 'Kinky', though not for any sexual proclivities I might add. He was five or six years older than me, of medium height, with springy hair, and had the high cheekbones of his Slav stock and lived alone in a converted hut on the Golf course, which he considered his personal

fiefdom. It wasn't that Kinky wasn't a nice guy, he was. It was just that he took things about his beloved golf course so seriously, which allied to a mine-field of a temper and an overly profane way of expression, made it difficult to get to know him. Going round the course with him to re-locate the holes on the greens was like going over a rocky road with gelignite in your pocket, you never knew when or where he would blow up, each explosion lasting for about two minutes before he found something else to moan about. The slightest things that nature or man would throw in his way were all perceived to be directly aimed at him:

"Goddam, motherfucking leaves! I told Eddie to sweep them off this morning. It's gonna piss it down with rain again, wouldn't you know it, just when I wanted some goddam sun!" Or conversely, "goddam sun, just when I wanted rain!" He remains the only person I have seen literally, to dance with rage. This was when the German refuse men turned up, not to take some garbage away, but to tip some on a small dump located in the woods. He stood in front of the truck shouting furiously at the driver and his mate who, both knowing Kinky, just laughed, which made him madder still and causing him to hop up and down not unlike a Red Indian in a war dance, while picking up pieces of mud and throwing it at the windscreen, screaming jerky profanities in both German and American:

"Dies-ist-kein- mother-fucking -mullplatz, (rubbish tip) du -arschloch." Bill, the antithesis of Kinky, when told of the incident made the slightly cryptic and funny observation that only Bill could make, "Nuttin aint gonna settle that Kinky man's ass down."

Late September was time for the final major tournament of the year, 'The German-American Open', and was a festive occasion for all the staff, with free beer being served on the terrace and garden. I had as usual arrived by bicycle and chained it to a drainpipe, the weather was fine and warm, and the celebrations began after the final game about six-o'clock, when a barrel, what in England would be called a 'hogshead' of Lowenbrau beer was tapped and tasty morsels cooked by the kitchen staff were consumed.

I remember practically nothing of the event. When the festivities were over around midnight, I do vaguely remember being advised by someone to leave my bike and walk, which I ignored. I felt OK. That is until I encountered the fresh air and tried to mount the bike, then it appeared that it had been tampered with. The steering was obviously faulty and I couldn't seem to keep the bike straight, furthermore, someone had obviously greased the saddle as I couldn't keep my backside on it for more than a few seconds, while the pedals seemed to have a will of their own. Finally, having made it as far as the club entrance my bike and I fell in a tangled heap at the side of the road.

I was immobile. The bike was laid across me and with all the will in the world I couldn't raise the strength or the desire to lift it off. A car stopped and asked if I was alright, I re-assured him and closed

my eyes, preparing to make the night of it, while laid on the grass verge. Suddenly, another car drew up, a green and white one with POLIZEI written on the side. I became suddenly more alert, staggering to my feet as the policeman lifted off the bike and directed me to lock it to the fence and step inside the car. I remember only that the two policeman were young, and as the car sped away I leaned over from the back seat and engaged them in conversation. Although my German was far from fluent it always improved when drunk, and seemed to have some effect, for I remember them laughing before they dropped me off at my abode, and then waiting till I had entered the back door before cruising away.

Upon awakening the next day, I had only a dim memory of the events of the previous night and could not at first even remember being given a lift by the police, or even remember where I had tied up my bike, but slowly the events of the previous night gradually began to piece themselves together. I retraced my way back to the Golf club some three miles away, looking left and right, but it was only when I got up close to the club entrance that I saw it and completely remembered the previous night's episode. In retrospect it was lucky that I never travelled far on the road that night, as it may well have ended up with a far more serious result than one of inebriation. I have also considered the attitude of the police towards me that night. Was it normal for them to take drunks home late at night? Would they have done the same for a Greek or Turk? - doubtful. And what would the police back in England have done in the same circumstances? But this was Bavaria: where in 1844 soldiers went on the rampage when the price of beer was increased, where four years later students in Munich attacked an over-priced brewery, then in 1910 two breweries were burnt down and countless inns smashed, and where drunks in general, were normally given the tolerance one would bestow to a slightly dotty, maiden aunt.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I was enjoying the company of 'English Ron' as we drank together in the 'Hippy Bar', a somewhat anachronistically named watering hole in the barracks, erected by the military - I guess we were still hippies to them - in an aim to divert funds into *their* pockets rather than those of Bavarian landlords. It achieved its aim only by its convenience, the interior being depressingly functional and criss-crossed with red tubular railings like a kiddies playground. It was cosy in that a dentists is cosy.

I broached the subject of a possible room at the Blaue Traube, a gasthaus in the centre of town where Ron had taken up residence, and he seemed very enthusiastic. In his East London twang he gave me the full sales patter, "Very des res mate, hot and cold running water inside and out - a reference to the brook, a tributary of the Loisach river that ran by the pub - a central location, and beer always available." It was the last point that swung it, and despite the DM300 a month rent, within a week I had moved from the dreaded annex to live in the adjacent room. I had known Ron since 1975 but I didn't really get to know him. I knew that he liked a drink, but I wasn't at that stage aware of how much. Not until about 5pm in the afternoon on the second day: I was lying on the single bed and reading a book, when came a knock on the door. I opened my mouth to shout an invitation to enter, but the door had opened and Ron was already in. He stood on the threshold swaying unsteadily, his shirt crumpled and partly hanging out of his trousers, while he rubbed a hand through his curly black hair. It was then that I first noticed a slight facial similarity to Colonel Gaddafi, the Libyan leader. He was a little younger than me and a little taller but more rotund, due in no small measure to countless bottles of Bavarian beer.

"Hello Pete," he slurred, "wanna drink?" I was about to reply when he spoke up again. "I'll just go and get one." He went next door, returning immediately with two opened bottles of beer and a bottle of plum brandy, he plonked these on the table and sat down.

"Oh what a day!" he sighed, and began to tell me of how he had just finished a farewell celebration up at the Eibsee, the lake high up in the mountains where he had been a car-park attendant.

"I've just driven down from the Eibsee," he said. "I quit you know - yeah, quit - didn't like it anyway really - Bastards!"

I have seen several drunks in my time but none as drunk as Ron that night yet still capable of coherent speech, and was wondering to myself how he had managed to drive down the hair-raisingly steep road down from the Eibsee lake.

He then launched into a synopsis of his life. His ramblings ranged from stories of work; to Monty Python; the landlord; to work again; to his past loves, and to his experiences as a drummer in a rock & roll band, all told with humour that ranged from boasting to self-deprecating. Finally he looked at my clock, it was 7-30pm.

"Well, Pete, I have to start work now."

"What! where?" I gasped, in disbelief.

"In the bar downstairs, I serve and wait tables two nights a week."

"Do you think you'll manage it?" I said, a little alarmed.

"Oh yeah," he slurred, "after a few beers I'll be fine." and lurched to the door, turning to raise a portending forefinger, crying out, "I shall return."

Three and a half hours later he was back in my room, and amazingly looking better than before and in fact more lively, babbling on and changing subjects with hardly a pause. It was around midnight that I started to feel weary but Ron was still talking, with animated gestures to emphasise a particular point. It was about this time that I began to doubt Ron's sanity, thinking he was on some kind of drug, but I had to admit he was funny. At 2am as I gratefully curled under the blankets, I suddenly realised that in about six hours of his company I had said only about a dozen sentences.

My first thoughts after waking bleary-eyed and thick of head next morning, was that the experience would not be repeated. Not so. In the many months ahead we were destined to have several conversations in a similar vein, but as I got to know him better, the more I got to like him. We appreciated each other's sense of humour and shared a fanatical love of Monty Python, whose audio tapes we used to listen to ad nauseam. This was some years before it became the vogue for many Brits to purchase a video player and have tapes sent over and before Ron obtained a girlfriend.

Ron was a person who had to have company, except on the few occasions he was coming down off the booze. He was definitely an alcoholic in the medical sense. Many doctors state that anyone who has more than three pints a day is afflicted with that disease, although I believe it is a relative term, for on that criterion, everyone I knew, including myself, were alcoholics! It didn't help that we lived above a pub, as the landlord, Hansi, a mercurial character and a Bavarian 'Rigsby' would let us have crates of Lowenbrau at a price that was a few pfennige below the normal retail price, while still ensuring him a profit.

In September, Sheamus arrived from America complete with American girlfriend. I allowed them to doss on my floor until they agreed with Hansi to rent the spare room down the passage, while Ron had also acquired a mate, Karen, a young and pretty English girl who, while on holiday visiting her elder sister had mysteriously fallen for the 'Gypo's' beery fragrance, silver-tongued charm and boozy antics. The 'Gypo' was Sheamus's word for him. I had to admit that it did suit his swarthy, rugged features and black curly hair.

The Blaue Traube soon became a British enclave as Ron and Karen moved into a larger room and their former single room was taken up by Grant,

a tall, English friend of ours who for some reason was known as 'Midnight', a great guy but somewhat eccentric: Twice a year in Garmisch there occurs what was known among us Brits and Americans as 'Junking': this was an occasion for the German citizens to 'junk' their unwanted articles on the pavements outside their homes to be collected by the refuse men some three days later. During this time, British and American inhabitants from the Annex and those who lived on the 'economy' would scour the streets like locusts, picking up selected pieces of furniture etc to grace their rooms. Some of these unwanted articles in this highly affluent area were of a surprisingly good quality and due to the changes in style and fashion, some decent skiing equipment could be found. Midnight had set his sights on acquiring a television and at the start of the 'junking' had Ron and Sheamus driving round in Ron's car and loading up with all available sets of varying age and sizes. At the end of three days he had five T V's in his small room that now resembled a branch of Dixons. After returning from work one day and hearing a babble of sound from next door I wandered in to investigate.

"Ah Pete," he said, "just in time." A chill of trepidation ran through me. Anything that involved Midnight was usually off-the-wall, and looking at the five hulking T V's, two of them emitting a sickly green picture as they crackled and spluttered while he fiddled and tuned, was enough to signal a retreat, and ignoring his entreaties to 'hold this antenna for a minute,' I made an excuse and backed out of the door to return the sanity of my room. Eventually, I discovered that he found one set could receive two channels but no sound; one set that received the third channel (Austrian) but no sound; and one that received all sound but no picture, thus ending up with three partially working TV's in one corner of the room, one on top of the other thus achieving the desired result. The worrying thing was, that he didn't seem to find this arrangement at all strange.

AFRC had a football team, all Brits and I think one American, and a German goalkeeper. Scots Kenny said he would have liked to have been goalkeeper, and once made the bizarre statement that he would give his right arm to play in goal for Scotland. His height however ruled him out of that position. He was about five feet two, stocky, with short black hair, a prominent forehead and a beer-blotched face. He was a throwback to the ancient Picts. The small race of underground dwellers who once inhabited the north east of Scotland. He worked as a kitchen helper in a hotel, where he could be seen stood on a upturned beer crate stirring huge bowls of steaming liquid with a giant ladle and giving out incomprehensible Scots mutterings like a malevolent dwarf conjuring up evil spirits.

The only time I saw the team play away was in November of that year and was against a German team some fifteen miles away. From there we planned to go to Oberammergau to see a quite famous English band 'The 'Sweet', who had hits in the late sixties and were playing in town later that night. There were around sixteen of us travelling in a mini-bus and two cars. Our chances of a victory that day seemed to

be remote when Kenny along with Phenol, John Baker, and an aspiring young dipsomaniac called B J, had brought along a bottle of American whisky and two crates of Lowenbrau, loading them in the bus, "tae get us in the mood ye ken." 'Welsh Steve' was a fairly abstemious member of the squad and, - apart from the German goalkeeper and Barney the captain - possibly the only one to take these games seriously, rolled his eyes to heaven. As we arrived the small, onion-domed Catholic church to the rear of the pitch was tolling its bell, and my memory went back again:

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It was to when I was a small boy of ten when I played for St Albans school in my village back in Yorkshire. For some reason, we had had to play a match against a local Protestant school, in the early afternoon. It meant only a short walk as the pitch was close to our school and the Catholic church, and we were fairly confident as the priest administered a blessing over us. We kicked off at 11am full of the holy spirit, and played for thirty minutes until half time, and as yet with no score. The second half we resumed with equal vigour, the priest assuring us that 'God was on our side,' an affirmation I doubted, but concluded we had the next best thing in Tommy, an altar boy and a devout member of an even more devout family of Irish Catholics. With five minutes left and a split second before 12 noon, the opposing centre-forward bore down on goal, only Tommy stood between him and our goalkeeper. Now Tommy was big for his age and a good player to boot, and it was almost guaranteed that he would soon intercept the small, frail-looking forward, when suddenly the Noon Angelus bell rang. Tommy instantly froze, and out of habit abruptly knelt on one knee and crossed himself to say the Angelus prayer. The amazed centre-forward almost lost his composure at this sight of an opposing centre-half, who normally would have clattered the ball and himself back to the halfway line, but was now seen to be transfixed and muttering incantations while crossing himself, and managed to slot the ball home. The disgust of his less religious team mates was much in evidence, even the priest was moved to remark later, that it was hardly the time and place for such extreme devotion

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The German team emerged from their smart, pine-wood changing rooms and sprinted onto the pitch, looking fit, well muscled and resplendent in their crisp, pressed kit, a fine advert for the Aryan race. Meanwhile, in our dressing room Kenny was wresting a bottle of beer from the uncooperative Sweat:

"Yer no, gasp, supposed tae drink oor beer, gasp, its fer the team."

"Oim the fookin physio" protested Sweat, "Oim allowed to use alcohol on medical grounds,"

"It's no a fuckin medical groond though, it's a footbah ground." The motley crew emerged from the changing room and trudged onto the

pitch. Kenny, one sock down to his ankles and shirt outside his shorts instructed Sweat to get some Ice.

"What for?" said Sweat, "nobody's injured yet are dey?"

"It's no fer the injuries" replied Kenny scornfully, "it's tae keep the beer cool!"

At half-time we were only losing three-one. Not a bad score considering that Kenny had been sent off after twenty minutes. Retaliating to a nasty foul by the tall centre back, he had jumped up and headed him in the groin. The second half was a massacre as the ten men were reduced to nine. Barney being the next one sent off; although they would have eventually succumbed to the superior fitness of the Germans and the biased referee. I had the impression that it was only the frequent dashes to the touchline to receive swigs of beer from 'physio' Sweat, that kept them going, combined with the knowledge that with him in charge of the beer and with Phenol, Kenny and BJ in close attendance, it would be their only chance to sample any!

At the end, it was a bedraggled and exhausted team that dragged themselves off the pitch, with many an Anglo-Saxon oath directed at the German referee. Kenny being especially bitter, confronting the referee and hurling accusations that he bore with a quiet dignity. Mainly due to the fact that although he could understand English perfectly, he understood Kenny not one bit. After showering and changing, the players and we spectators started on the the beer that remained, the bottle of whisky was also produced and an impromptu sing-song developed which greatly amused the German team, and over drinks the ill-tempered match was forgotten; even Kenny was seen under the calming influence of the whisky, shaking hands with his opposing marker, and shortly after we set off.

We arrived at the venue in Oberammergau - the scene of the world famous passion play and held every ten years - an hour or so later. Although not yet in receipt of the full effects of the alcohol we had put down quite a hefty deposit, and were already in a merry mood as we approached the hall entrance. It was a DM10 entrance fee. This forced tight-wad Phenol to hang around while the doorman's back was turned and then sneak in. He always seemed very proud of these small victories, and thought of them as a series of battles with the establishment, whom he perceived, had as their sole aim in life, a wish to part him from his money.

"Ten marks!" he declared in an injured tone. "I can get twelve beers fer that!"

The room was simply designed, rectangular, with a stage at one end and a bar at the other, and was already quite full of well dressed German youth chatting and drinking soberly, many of them only drinking coke while waiting for the support band. Kenny, Phenol, Sweat, myself and a few of the other die-hard drinkers were stood at the bar, this position affording us the minimum of waiting time between drinks. The support band was a German group. They were good and everyone commented

that they were worth the price of entrance alone. All that is except Phenol. But then he would have declared the Beatles as not worth the price of DM10.

As the evening progressed and the interval came the British contingent became gradually more vocal and belligerent, singing football-type chants along with rugby songs of utmost crudity while sliding half the length of the room on the slick covering of beer that had somehow accumulated on the floor. This behaviour was viewed by the Germans with a mixture of amusement, bemusement and disgust. The Sweet's roadie, obviously not expecting such raucous British vocals amid a famous, peaceful town in Southern Bavaria, came out to view the scene, and spying mild-mannered John Baker who was on the stage and harmlessly shouting to someone in the crowd, the roadie grabbed him and flung him into the crowd below. Turning to walk back stage, he had covered only two paces when he received a stunning rabbit punch on the back of the neck which sent him reeling. Recovering, he was a second or so late in discovering his phantom assailant, who had disappeared to mingle with the now silent crowd.

The German audience had never seen anything quite like it and a pregnant silence held sway over the hall, while little Kenny undetected among the tall figures surrounding him, rubbed his fist in front of Barney, growling incomprehensible Scots threats of more violence to follow should the roadie make an issue of it. Things were eventually smoothed over by the time 'The Sweet' commenced their gig, but by this time we were all fired up on alcohol and oblivious to what they sounded like.

Sweat was in a dancing mood and together with B J gave a wild rendition of a fifties bop, B J sliding through Sweat's legs in authentic style, except that Sweat failed to hold on to him, with the result that B J's alcohol suffused form was sent aquaplaning on the slippery floor at a fair rate of knots, knocking a happily dancing German couple flying like a set of ninepins. This quite naturally caused a little friction on the dance floor and at one point things may have turned ugly, but was calmed down by the few sensible and sober members of the party. The 'Sweet' were only worthy of top billing because of their reputation. When they had finished the Germans applauded politely as they retreated ignominiously from the stage to a chorus of cat-calls and beer coasters from us Brits, much to the amazement of the Oberammergau youth, but as Brits, I suppose we were uniquely qualified to bestow on them such abuse, after which we filed meekly out to be driven back to our mountain lair. By the time we arrived back in Garmisch, my sides were aching with the laughter brought on by the whole day's many spontaneous acts of mayhem and humour, and apart from the 'flying Krauts', as Kenny named the unfortunately skittled German couple, we did no harm to anyone, the retelling of the tales enlivening many an hour in the 'Chance'.

The coming winter season found me back behind the ski counter, and due to the minimal amount of custom, became extremely tedious. Later,

when the first serious snow came and settled on the Hausberg slope, I volunteered for the outside job on the tow rope. This was a wire cable loop with plastic handles at five yard intervals, which the kids grabbed in order to be pulled up the slope of some sixty yards, from which they would turn off and ski down to repeat the process, happy as only kids could be with such a simple recreation. I had a young American lad, Greg, helping me with the technicalities of the job. Our sole function was to sit there beside a post with a on-off switch attached to it and press the appropriate button as required. I proposed that he have charge of the ON button and I the OFF. This tedium was alleviated only by the need to fill in worn-away parts of the slope with fresh snow now and again. All this unabashed and inefficient waste of money and manpower would have had work-efficiency experts in fits of apoplexy, but this was the U S Armed forces, and although the money wasn't that great it was rare that you were overworked.

Fresh snow was made when needed by means of a snow machine. It created snow by means of water pumped through nozzles that surrounded a huge fan, and when the temperature was under or a little above freezing point, could produce acceptable snow covering directed to wherever needed. The task of ensuring an adequate cover of snow prior to the arrival of the skiers fell to an American guy everyone called 'Frosty', and myself, which meant I would have to report for duty at 6am and work for three hours before assuming my normal occupation. In previous years the job was directed by Kinky, who combined this with the job of ski instructor for the German ski school nearby, a cosy arrangement which was scuppered after a review of work-practice, a decision that left him predictably perturbed:

"Goddam AFRC don't know shit, they'll hire some guy who don't know shit, I've done that motherfuckin' job for ten years, they don't know goddam shit."

The February of 85 had the coldest temperatures recorded for some fifty years. I and my partner were taking it in turns to be on the tow bar, one of us spending every alternate hour in the restaurant/bar. I wore 'long Johns'; jeans; ski pants; vest; shirt; jersey and ski jacket, together with two pairs of socks and moon boots, but after one hour the cold permeated even through those layers, and I was glad to take refuge inside.

It was on these nights before I had to rise early for snowmaking duty that I was glad that Ron had found a girlfriend to keep him occupied. I would wake at around 5am, and while out in the passage that led to the bathroom, take one quick look out through the door that led to the balcony at the still dark, outside world. My room window would be opaque with the frozen condensation that formed fascinating and intricate patterns outside, as all I had to heat the room was a small fan heater which was turned off at night. Indeed, during the day and due to Hansi's parsimony by installing an electric meter for the rooms of all his British occupants - an overloading of the circuits also caused the tripping of the fuses when more than three or four

appliances on the landing were switched on - the rooms were far below the temperature required for comfort. My saviour was a thick duvet that kept me warm while I slept. A newly hatched penguin breaking out of the warm egg must feel like that first reluctant parting with the comforting duvet, as I woke up and made my way down the cool passage to the unheated bathroom. It was an unwelcome shock to the system, but feeling more alive after my ablutions I would stride back to the room, sure in the knowledge that the fuses wouldn't trip, and prepare on my double hot plate, a calorie-packed, fry-up breakfast that would ensure I kept going until noon in the freezing temperature outside.

Well fed, and attired in several layers of clothing topped by an indispensable ski hat, I made my way down to the freezing passage downstairs where my mountain bike was tethered, my fingers already feeling the cold as I untied the lock from the wheels and steered it outside, my breath forming plumes of vapour and my feet and the tyres crunching on the frozen ice and snow. Cycling in Garmisch at that time of the morning in winter was an almost unearthly experience. The crunch of snow under the tyres the only sound, apart from the birds protesting at their awakening to such cold yet again, while the brooding mountains draped in snow and illuminated by the pale moonlight, surveyed the wintry scene below with a lofty indifference. I was never the first at the lodge as Bob would be there with Ted, the restaurant manager. They would be sipping coffee and telling tales as if they had been there all night, while Frosty would always be twenty minutes late, which meant I could get some hot coffee down me and join in with the chat. Fatal really! I was warm once again only to be forced out in the cold once more.

At the side of my tow-rope station was a small wooden shed, this contained a well, full with water, and a heater which had been on all night. At such low temperatures -24C, even this precaution was not enough to keep the surface of the well from freezing. Strung about the shed were coils of 4" diameter, nylon fabric pipes, and inside the well a metal pipe that connected to a pump was immersed, this in turn connected to the feeder pipe outside. This pipe ran along the side of the 200 yard slope with valved connections for the hosepipes at approximately 25 metre intervals. The first action was to haul the snow machine to the desired position by using the caterpillar, a small vehicle built like a tank, then switch on the heat to the spray nozzles, all these actions being performed by moonlight, until sunrise approached.

Dawn is a fascinating part of the day. In the twilight of evening it is the darkness which is active and all-enveloping, in the first light of morning however, it is the light which is active and the exhausted darkness of night that eventually submits, and when the first hint of a new day sends a skulking body of light to slowly form a halo around the mountain peaks, sending probing fingers sneaking through the gaps on the eastern horizon. Then, the fields, pine trees and the nearby German ski-school change gradually from silhouettes into clear,

discernible objects, and the birds dawn chorus mingling with the crunch of snow under the steel caterpillar tracks, sound starkly resonant in the still, freezing air.

Meanwhile, oblivious to nature's perfunctory handling of a new day I would be cursing and sweating, dragging the heavy 20 yard lengths of hose up to the appropriate junction of the main feeder pipe. If this was above halfway it was a desperate job as the snow at the sides in places not normally skied was quite deep, and having trudged through to the nearest outlet and despite the cold, the sweat would begin to trickle down from my neck and upper chest. If you were really unlucky it would be found that the valve had frozen and had to be thawed out by blowlamp, which meant another trudge to the shed and back, forcing me despite the freezing air to undo the top buttons of my jacket. Having thawed out the valve, connected the pipe and then connected the other end to the machine, we were set to go. I would then plod down the slope to the shed, man the pump and wait for the signal. Hearing the shout I would start it up. If after a minute or so, Frosty shouted again, it would be to turn it off, as in the abnormal, freezing temperature even the heating nozzles had not worked, this meant we would have to uncouple the hose and roll it up to prevent the water inside freezing. This procedure would have to be repeated until we either succeeded, or more usually, gave in, cold, wet and miserable, suffused with sweat and fed up. The only smidgin of comfort to me was that it was placid, mild-mannered, Frosty who was in charge, and not short-tempered, gelignite-brained Kinky. I could not have endured all the impotent rage with the inevitable "Motherfuckers" and "Goddam shit".

At the end of another winter season, some of the employees were leaving to travel or go back to their countries of origin, and it was always with sadness that I saw people leave. Travelling is an odyssey of hello's and goodbyes, and this was an environment in which the constant intermingling of young people thrown into such a comparatively laid-back organisation as AFRC, and set as it was in such a place, was bound to lead to some people taking paths that in the normal course of events they would have never contemplated had they been elsewhere, and inevitably some relationships were destroyed. Lifelong sweethearts could be pulled apart, normally by exposure to a lifestyle that they previously never realised existed; for it was a melting pot of travellers, a crossroads for peripatetic tellers-of-tales, which fed us stories of strange lands, wheedling people away from old ways and mates that were found wanting in imagination or adventure. But Garmisch being the place it was, there was always some humour to be squeezed from even these sad cases:

Danny, a Scot, had fell madly in love with a girl then left for his home in East Kilbride for a holiday, where risking his tap room, macho status, he informed his mates that he was in love. He had hardly been gone two days however, when she met a soldier who had his wicked way with her, then left. Full of remorse she went to Danny's mate, 'Convict

Kevin' for consolation. He apparently consoled her so much that she ended up sleeping with him also. Danny, on returning and hearing this sordid and treacherous tale went to confront Kevin, who tried to explain away the situation to him.

Kevin: "Look Dannny, she was a slut. She wasn't good enough for you."

Danny: "She was fucking well good enough for you though, wasn't she?"

As the spring arrived, I started work as bicycle repair man, shades of Michael Palin in Monty Python. My workplace was the former bar section of the International Grill, where I had worked as food helper alongside Fat Mark in 80/81, and where I had had my first introduction to the American way of life over nine years before. The bar/dance hall had been closed the previous year, and only the restaurant part kept open, now as a steak house, with a small bar that gave out to the tennis courts where the instructors gave lessons.

I had charge of about forty bikes, they were of German manufacture, the cheapest on the market and nothing complicated to fix. To help me in my task I had a brand new chest of gleaming wrenches, a stand that enabled the bikes to be worked on whilst raised off the ground, and Bill. He was there ostensibly to take care of the rental side, but spent most of his time pottering about in the basement of the adjacent, 'Tours and Information Office', where an Aladdin's cave of bicycle parts accumulated over many years were strewn in every conceivable nook and cranny. He proclaimed that he would build himself a 'lean, mean, green machine.'

As the warmer weather of June arrived, I moved the bike stand outside. This not only gave me plenty of fresh air and sun, but a view of the girls on the tennis courts and a break from Bill, who would either be sounding off about his demotion from golf course manager over ten years before: "Ah went to see dat Coynell Kanorowski, or whatever his name was, he didn't do nuttin" "So ah went to see General Haigh when he was in town, he wouldn't see me neither," or rummaging around for parts for the cannibalising of his bike, while muttering to himself, "Dat sure don't fit, wonder if ah try this, or if ah puts dat der."

My job was in certain respects the best I have ever had, in that it had everything one could want, except power and money. I had the satisfaction of using my know-how and hands, I was virtually my own boss, without any responsibility, and could also get away for a while as I had to test the bikes, no? I would on sunny days just set up my bike stand on the lawn outside and watch the world glide slowly by while giving the appearance of doing something. Trueing a buckled wheel for example, I always contrived to make it last: spinning the wheel, then squinting at a fixed spot while determining the amount of turn a spoke would need, like Michaelangelo eyeing up the place for the next tap of the mallet on pristine marble.

It was an idyllic set-up, but as often happens in life one is forced by circumstance to variate from the ideal. In July Bill took a six weeks vacation, a cruise to the Norwegian fiords. He was replaced by an ex-helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran, Charlie, who had spent some time in a hospital reserved for those 'mentally disturbed' ex-military, who had participated in that unsavoury episode in America's history. It hadn't seemed to have done much good. Charlie was the type of guy who was somewhat to the right of Mussolini, and subscribed to magazines like 'Soldier of Fortune', that advertised sales of everything military, such as the latest in semi-automatics or what this year's mercenary soldier is wearing. I once heard him in conversation with three fellow red-necks, three young guys who sported the close shaven head of the 'Rangers' troop. It was also the first time I had ever heard any members of the military refer to that ghost that refuses to go away, Vietnam:

"If we'd have used 'the bomb' man," declared Charlie, "we'd have wiped them gooks off the face of the fuckin earth."

"Yeah right man, we're still number one," said the other moron. The philosopher of the quartet, bore a badge that said: "RANGERS. We kick ass therefore we are." It was like listening to four kids playing at war, with the sad realisation that these were four grown up men who, due to whatever external factors had acquired a hatred against any lifestyles and persons who were at variance with their narrow-minded views. But what I thought scary, was that three of these men were hardly out of their teens, and if they thought like that now...?

Charlie had one of those fake, supposedly humorous, business cards that he had ordered from one of the flaky magazines he read. Showing it to me, it read in bold letters: 'Chopper Charlie'. Along with the phrases: 'Say who'll die, Charlie will fly', and 'Choppers and Chicks serviced and taken to new heights'. He didn't last long. It was well known that the powers that be regarding him as a loose cannon, were only biding their time before finding some reason to fire him, and one was given to them on a plate, when one day he marched into the office of the boss and threatened him with a gun. Luckily, the gun wasn't loaded and the MP's were summoned before any violence ensued, but thankfully that was the end of 'Chopper Charlie'.

During the hiatus between Charlie's leaving and Bill's return I took over the rental too, which considering I did most of that even when Bill was here was no hardship, but even so I was glad to see him return, if only to indulge in more amusing banter:

"How was the cruise then Bill?" I asked him on his first day back.

"Same as last year," he said.

"What do you mean?" I replied.

"Same as last year, no different."

"You mean you go on the same trip every year?" I was suddenly intrigued.

"Ah sure do" he said, "Ah gets a discount for being a regular

traveller-and ah gets to eat at the captain's table too," he added proudly.

"What did you have then Bill" I asked, "Kimchi and gunpowder tea?"

"You know you're sumpin else Pete, eh, eh, eh." he cackled, and all that morning he kept shaking his head and repeating, "Kimchi and gunpowder tea, eh, eh, eh."

It was a gloriously hot summer that year, one day reaching 99 degrees! I was outside working on a bike, while eying nubile, sweating and tennis-skirted, bundles of athleticism, and fending off Bill's entreaty to come and sort out a problem he was having with the "lean, mean, green machine" that he had been working on since May. He had been mooching around in the spare parts room more than usual in the last few days, bearing wheels, tyres, brake assemblies, saddles etc, while muttering to himself and leaving my brand new wrenches scattered around. Some minutes later, Dutch Frank, the sweating, tennis instructor came off the court and gave me two one mark pieces for two beers. I made for the tourist information building that housed the beer machine and retrieved the ice-cold 1/2 litre beers from their slots. Frank was still on duty and would take his beer concealed from prying eyes in my workplace.

He was waiting for me and followed me into the cool interior and we stood sipping at the beer while watching Bill at work, always an amusing experience, both noticing he had a black glove on his right hand. I was reluctant to mention it, knowing that to do so would probably invite a weird or bizarre answer. Frank however, was staring at it, fascinated. Bill came over, and noticing Frank's gaze, waved the gloved hand in the air. "Michael Jackson, eh, eh, eh." He then turned to me. "Pete, now you knows about bikes and how dey woyk, well ah got a little problem." He led me over to his bike while Frank followed, sensing something else amusing in the offing. Scratching his bald pate, Bill looked down at the bike.

"Ah caint seem to get de brakes to reach de rim on de back wheel." I looked carefully at the brake assembly, it seemed fine, apart from the blocks only reaching the tyres. I checked round the front looking at the brakes there, they seemed okay, albeit that they were a different design and I couldn't quite figure the reason why the rear brakes should be so different. I looked at it for five minutes but gave up, concluding that the brake assembly was too short. I was however looking at it too logically and had forgotten to include Bill's ineptness in the equation. It was Frank who arrived at the problem:

"The wheel at the back is smaller than the wheel at the front," he declared. I looked at him for a second then looked at the bike. Of course it was! I looked at Bill who was stepping backwards while adjusting his spectacles.

"Frank," he said, "ah think yo's right, eh eh eh." Frank looked at me, shook his head in wonder and started to laugh as he slipped, bent double, out of the door. Bill turned round to me in order to

remonstrate.

"Pete, yo supposed to be de bike man here why didn't yo tell me." Next day he came to me and said: "well, if I sell de bike as it is now, ah's got a catchy slogan for it."

"What's that, Bill?"

"AH TELL NO LIES, ITS WHEELS ARE DIFFERENT SIZE, eh, eh, eh."

Originating in America, mountain bikes would have probably made their European debut in a US base, and what a great idea they were! Especially for a place like Garmisch. And if ever a part of Europe could be said to be made for that pursuit it is Southern Bavaria. I have spent many idyllic summer days on my mountain bike. Visiting lakes that teemed with fish; cycling through luxurious meadows that grew grass as green as any in the world; watching sleek cows Hoovering the juicy blades, while the sound of church bells echoing off the mountains and into the valleys summoned the solid citizens, who would later decamp to the local gasthaus to quaff inordinate amounts of their excellent brew. And then you could, if fit enough, make your way by one of the crucifix-lined paths that wound at the foot of the mountains and two or three hours later - via a gasthaus or two - find yourself on a distant summit, from where you could gaze at the splendour of it all. Not all bike trips are so idyllic however, and it was during one of these autumnal cycling trips that I and two friends were picked up by the police, as suspects on a murder charge!:

It was mid September and another beautifully warm day. It was one of my days off and I decided to ride the short trip up to one of the three lakes that lay in the proximity of Garmisch, the Riesersee. I decided to take my racing bike as it was on paved roads that were not so steep. Half an hour later I reached the lake, the warm weather and half mile of incline leaving me sweating when I finally dismounted. Riesersee is not a big lake, one could walk round it in 30 minutes and has little of interest except for the general scenery, with just the hotel that has a fine lakeside terrace should one require a meal or drink. Not that any of us cheapskate Brits would contemplate such extravagance. We would content ourselves with bringing our dirt-cheap brews fresh from the fridge.

And so it was that on walking round the lake I spied two more cheapskates, thin, spider-limbed Hughie and beer-bellied 'Sweat' who, wherever he was, always oozed a sense of permanence, lazing on a grassy knoll, the inevitable and now apparently empty beer bottles lying forlornly on the grass. I walked up, laid the bike on the ground nearby and walked over. Sitting down beside them I extricated a beer from my small rucksack, still cool and streaked with condensation. Sweat looked on, salivating at the sight.

"Yez only got the one, Pete?" he asked, imbuing the question with a wistfulness that was both pathetic and irresistible.

"No," I replied, in my W C Fields voice. "I have yet another, which I am about to immerse in yonder lake, the better to retain that optimum temperature that brings out fully the flavour of the delightful German

brew." Sweat's smile at my impersonation ill disguised his disappointment.

"On the other hand," I said, pointing at my small rucksack, "as you look like giving me a hard time if I don't, you can have it."

"Fine man y'are," declared Sweat, suddenly galvanised, and dived into my pack, pulling out the bottle and looking at it tenderly, as one would a new born baby, before attacking the top with the opener and taking a huge swig. An action which so alarmed Hughie that he pulled at his arm.

"Hey Sweat, steady on, save some for me." It was like watching two vampires lusting after blood.

So there we were, an Englishman an Irishman and a Scotsman, idly relaxing on our days off from bike repair, dishwashing and reservations office respectively, taking in the scenery and beer on the sun-drenched bank of a Bavarian lake surrounded by mountains, discussing the meaning of the universe and the possible champions of the present season's English football league. I was laid out on the grass in shorts and T-shirt, my arm and hand propping up my head and soaking up the sun while chatting nonchalantly and carefree. It was then we noticed two incongruous looking suits advancing towards us. The leader was the older of the two, and it was he who addressed us in German while showing us his

I D card, which bore a stamp, small lettering and the word POLIZEI in large letters, he then asked us for our I D card. We explained that we were not German and thus not issued with such means of identification. Finding that I owned the bike, he then rather curiously turned to Hughie and told him to ride it to the police station, then asked Sweat and myself to come with him. He would not answer questions as he led us round the lakeside into the green and white police car in the car park, and after asking where I lived he then took us down to the Blaue Traube, where he escorted me inside, up the stairs and into my room. Having retrieved my passport I was then escorted back into the car and driven to the police station.

This was most mysterious, and we were examining our minds for any possible misdeeds perpetrated lately. Soon we were in the station and being led upstairs and into a room, where two more men were ensconced in chairs. The four men chatted a while and I caught a few words. They were laughing over something that had to do with this hapless trio of an English man, Irish man and a Scots man they had on their hands. Perhaps they too had heard of the jokes? Presently, the leader, who introduced himself as Max, came over to us and told us they were investigating the murder of a garage proprietor some ten months previously and asked what we were doing on the 15th November, if we had ever been near that garage, did we know the man, etc? We denied knowledge of everything he asked, Sweat maintaining that he was in Dublin at the time, and eventually he gave up and went outside with his colleague.

This still left two men, one of whom looked pretty fed up at being

there and scowled up at the cause of his sojourn in the cramped little office.

"Yer man looks a right Nazi," whispered Sweat. A little too loudly it seemed, as the gruppenfuhrer looked up swiftly at this remark and fixed Sweat with an icy stare.

"Shuddup yer prat," I hissed from the side of my mouth. The man rose from his chair and ambled over.

"Ver Ver you ze 15th November?" he said to Sweat in icy, Gestapo-like tones.

"In Dublin," Sweat chirped back happily, "it's in mi passport."

"Lucky for you", said the man, then turning, and fixing me with an icy glare, "but not so lucky for you."

We had been there for three hours, being questioned by our Nazi friend and the other in turn until we went to give our thumbprints, then to another room to stand in front of a two-way mirror while a witness apparently looked us over, then it was back to the office, where we were asked if we required an interpreter before we made our official statements. We both assented. While waiting for the interpreter I was wondering what had happened to Hughie? We had a glimpse of him as he once passed the office in company with a detective, a glum look on his lean face as he was led down the stairs, and I couldn't help noticing that he seemed to be walking a little strangely. Sweat meanwhile, would only grumble every twenty minutes or so that, "dey should give us some fookin food." I was starting to shiver as my shorts and T-shirt-clad body was feeling the lack of heat, although it could be said that nerves played no small part. Even though I knew I was innocent of all charges it was still a strange feeling to be held as suspect for a murder.

The interpreter arrived, a middle-aged German woman who relayed the questions asked by the Gestapo detective, then relating in turn my replies in German. Having done with me she turned on Sweat, whose first comment was to repeat like a parrot, "I was in Dublin, it's in mi passport", before asking if he could have some food. This was relayed to the Gestapo man, who shook his head while giving out a thin smile. With the two question sessions over, the woman left. We were left alone with the two other detectives for some time, when a low rumble came from Sweat's stomach, catching the attention of all in the room.

"D'yer hear dat," he said, "I'm fookin starvin'."

"Will you stop going on about food," I whispered.

"But I haven't had a fookin ting since yesterday," he complained.

"What about the 'flussiges brot'," I replied, flippantly, referring to the beer.

"Ah, well, it does fill the gap a bit," he replied.

"Ask him for a beer then," I retorted, but was half joking. He needed no further prompting.

"Entschuldigen," said Sweat to the scribbling detective. "Haben sie beer?" He made a drinking motion with his hand. I looked at the man and smiled, a kind of excuse him he's Irish, sort of smile. The man

looked at his colleague, muttered a few words and the other man went out, returning five minutes later with two bottles of cold beer. "Don't tell me they've a beer machine in the cop shop" I said, amazed, as we grasped the cold bottles.

"Why not"? 'Said Sweat, "dey - the Bavarians - have one everywhere else."

I can not imagine anywhere else in the western world where persons brought in for questioning on a murder charge would be given alcohol; although they must have known we were innocent of all charges, and before we had consumed the beer, Max came in, ignored the bottles and told us we could go. Accompanying us down the stairs he shook our hands and explained that he had to hold us for so long as it was a serious charge. It appeared that a woman at the Eibsee lake had identified Hughie as bearing a resemblance to a man seen in an alley near the dead man's home, but had said that on closer inspection through the two-way mirror, that it was not him.

"Nobody who's still alive looks like Hughie," murmured Sweat. We bade Max goodbye and started for home. I saw my bike propped up against the building, but it was locked with the key I had given to Hughie, so we both walked into the middle of town.

We were soon disabused that the unfortunate incident would be suppressed, when the following night at the 'Zirbel Stube', a favourite watering hole, Hughie came in to cries of "ye dirrty murrderin bastard," in what purported to be a Scots accent, from Ron, who was enjoying himself as usual. At the fifth cry of the same, Hughie took umbrage and told him to shut up, which Ron immediately complied with, resigning himself to stabbing motions behind his back.

"I wonder why Max made you ride my bike down to the station?" I asked Hughie later that night.

"I don't know," he said, "but my feet were killin' me."

"Why's that?," I asked, bewildered.

"Well," said Hughie, "ye know ye have them metal pedals and toe clips on yer bike." I nodded. "So?"

"So," said Hughie. "Ah couldna get ma boots in, so ah had to tak them aff, tie them roond ma neck and ride with just ma socks on yer metal pedals all the way doon, it was killing me - I would have committed murder just to get aff the fucking thing!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was now almost ten years since I had first arrived in Garmisch. I considered it my home now and had no intentions of moving again, but I had learnt that in AFRC it was wise not to take anything for granted; almost everyone and everything that was connected with the US military was continually in a state of flux, as new commanders took over who tried things that a previous commander had tried years before and ditched. Nobody could really plan anything as things changed with such startling frequency, policies enacted in distant Washington affecting many lives in the gigantic web of U S Forces bases worldwide.

Everyone in the Blaue Traube was now working. I at the bicycle rental, 'Midnight' at the General Patton Hotel under the gimlet eye of Frau Surman, and Ron and Seamus at the Sheridan Hotel which stood within the barracks that enclosed the Gymnasium and Annex. Little did we know it then, but we were within a few years of events that would render the stay of many American troops in West Germany, as it was then, redundant, and consequently all those in their employ. And as if cognisant of these impending events, certain employees at the Sheridan Hotel were indulging in a slight manipulation of the restaurant finances. Seamus and Ron of course, denying that they were involved in what was known as the 'Green Ticket Scam':

It appeared that Uncle Sam would allow the G I's on R&R a certain amount of green tickets. These tickets were intended to be redeemed for food, shows and and other recreational facilities, and NOT for alcoholic beverage or money. That is where the helpful hotel employee would enter the scene. For 50c on the dollar, the G I's could get cash. In exchange for \$20 worth of green tickets, for example, the G I would receive \$10 or equivalent in DM, from a friendly waiter, the \$20 in tickets could then be exchanged by the waiter when paying the cashier at the end of the evening, thus giving the waiter a nice \$10 profit for a few seconds work. Naturally these tales leaked out to the outside world, and it was soon everyone's ambition to be either chief executive of AFRC or be a Sheridan Hotel waiter. Discussing a forthcoming St Patrick's day party in the canteen one day, someone suggested that we need a fiddler to provide the right atmosphere. Phenol looked up from his book and wryly pointed out that one could be found at the Sheridan as, "the place is louping with fiddlers."

The Sheridan Hotel like many Bavarian hotels boasted many intemperate characters. Bodo, the second chef was certainly an alcoholic, and in a normal environment this would have stood out as plain as a pikestaff, but in the hazy world of Bavarian kitchens his problem was regarded as nothing abnormal, this predeliction to alcohol ran through the whole staff at the 'Sheridan: Starting from the bottom, we had 'Thailand Terri', an English girl whose main expenditure was on cheap beer from the beer machine, bottles of cheap vodka and certain dried herbs, while her skin had an unhealthy pallor due to lack of sunlight.

With hardly anyone outside the hotel having occasion to see her, she haunted the stark, gloomy corridors, bumping along the walls with eyes half-closed, hair awry and a dreamy expression on her face, wandering aimlessly like a lost spirit. She would work for a a year to 18 months as a spülerin, during which time she spent little, squirreling away what she could in order to live in Thailand for a year or so, before returning again to go through the same frugal and amorphous existence. The last I heard of her she was reported to have gone 'tropo' in some lesser known island in the Phillipines, eking out an existence among the natives and engaging the poor fishermen in stubborn haggles over a few pence, for fish.

Then there was of course my old mate Ron, a gentleman not averse to the odd little drink himself. Once celebrating a birthday - which apparently lasted for three days - he was asked by some G I in the dining room, what Ravioli was? Ron replied that it was "like tea bags in tomato sauce." It was thought then that he be banished to the back kitchen to clean the silverware until he had sobered up. Anthony, who was a former cook at the 'Last Chance', where he would occasionally get out his guitar and sing a few songs where his rendition of 'Old Shep' would often reduce me to tears - and I don't laugh easily. Sheamus was another waiter who had a love affair with the beer, but he only erupted occasionally and in the Sheridan toper's hierarchy, was way down the list, being relegated to the little league. Well, I always thought Seamus had missed his vocation and should have been a gossip columnist, and I suppose someone had to be sober in order to remember the stories.

The boss of this motley crew was Herr Langner, a barrel chested, six foot plus, swarthy ex-French Foreign Legionnaire. Naturally, as a leader of dipso's he was willing to lead from the front. Sheamus summed him up thus: 'He would have his first drink of the night, a 1/2 ltr beer, at 6 o'clock, then within an hour he would sink three more. It was at this point that we would all be on tenterhooks, it could go either way. As he opened his fifth beer, we all tried to ensure that nothing would occur which could annoy him. If we were lucky, he stayed in a jovial, slightly buzzed, good mood all evening, but, if by some chance something happened to upset him during the critical fifth beer, then he could turn into a screaming Banshee, and all our lives would be made miserable for the rest of the evening.'

When he was in such a mood, Basil Fawltly would appear a model of civility in comparison and was to political correctness, what King Herod was to child care.

"Why you no go back to Africa?" he once yelled at a black, American lady diner one day, and as she threatened to have him sacked, laughed in her face. And to a group of five young G I's, one of whom, had called him a "motherfucker."

"Yes, I fuck your mother," he said to the youth, and turning to to the next youth, "and yours," and so on in turn to the remaining three. To understand why he remained in his job, one would have to

understand that under the strict pro-worker labour laws in Germany for employees with long service, no less an offence than bugging the head chef would have caused his dismissal and so he got away with it, despite a load of letters and complaints left by irate customers.

He did meet his Waterloo one day however, as he indulged in his habit of giving any new spüler a good baptism of fire on their first day. A certain spüler, whose name no-one seemed to know, for he didn't stay long enough, wasn't prepared to take Herr Langner's usual 'welcome' and came flying over the counter at him, but not before grabbing Bodo's meat cleaver on the way. Langner was no coward, ex-Legionnaires seldom are, but after looking at the cleaver and the demented spüler's expression decided that discretion was the better part of valour and set off in the opposite direction at a fair old clip, but slipped on a soggy piece of food that littered the floor, breaking an ankle in the process. This at least had the effect of halting the advancing spüler, who ripped off his apron and with a valedictory, "you can stick this job up your arse," to the supine and cursing Langner, departed from the kitchen, out of the hotel and out of Garmisch, never to be seen again. Jeff Bollocks, the spülers' unofficial chairman, was in awe of such bravado, and mooted the idea of having a medal struck: 'The Unknown Spüler's medal'. "For valour in face of the enemy." Or in the words of Sweat: "For taking no shit."

Sweat at this time was finding himself under severe alcoholic pressure, and was debating whether to book himself in for the drying-out process that was administered in the hospital for dipsomaniacs, wino's and the like. It was not the first time he had been to take the 'Kur', several years earlier he had booked himself in only days after leaving Ireland. He had left Dublin for Liverpool, and apparently partook of a "fookin mad session" on the boat; then from Liverpool to London and more booze; London to Munich, "a huge fookin session" again and arriving in Garmisch just as a "fookin massive party" was about to start at the lodge where the British squaddies stay on their winter 'Snow Queen' exercises, resulting in "der best o' der fookin lot." He then found casual work in of all places, the Sheridan Hotel kitchen, which was akin to a vampire working in a blood bank.

His body now a wreck, and shaking that much, he looked like he was auditioning for a Mexican, maraca band, he decided in this dipsomaniac state that there was only one man in town he could turn to for professional advice, Duncan, the bearded and equally intemperate Scot who worked as receptionist at the General Von Steuben Hotel. Now for Sweat to ask Duncan for advice on how to sober up, was like Maggie Thatcher asking for lessons on humility from Napoleon. Duncan, true to form suggested a few beers, but even Sweat knew this was bum advice so eventually booked himself in at the hospital. The news inevitably reached the finely-tuned antenna of Sheamus who, along with Ron, turned up to visit him the following day:

It took some time to find him and no-one seemed to know where he was located. He was not in a single room or even a ward, but after further investigations they were directed to what looked like a large cupboard door flush with the wall. Tentatively opening it they found themselves in a somewhat more expansive space, not unlike like Dr Who's Tardis, and espied Sweat sitting up in a trolley that the orderlies used for conveying patients about the hospital. He was surrounded on all sides by shelves holding containers of cleaning liquid, disinfectant, pan scourers, brushes and other sundry cleaning equipment. He was looking quite well after a drug-induced twenty four hour sleep, and said that that he was feeling fine. "But," he said, as he gave a glance round the store room. "I don't think much o' der fookin room."

Garmisch is a beautiful place, but it was extremely difficult for anyone in Garmisch who mixed in the circles that I did, to avoid the perils of alcohol. As the previous chapters have described, it was the central hub around which we all revolved. Seamus, when talking on the related subject of drinking to excess told me of when he met another of the great drinking legends of Garmisch: He was over on holiday, and after three hard days drinking he was in bits. It was 11am and said he was feeling trapped in the vicious circle of whether to follow the Duncan dictum and have a beer to stop the shakes, or go through 'cold turkey', when who should he meet up with but 'Shaky Sal':

"Ah Sally, what should I do?" He said, "I feel terrible, I have to come off the booze or I'll end up like...er, Sweat or Phenol," he just avoided saying, YOU.

"Well how bad are you?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "I can't stop shaking, and can't get to sleep until I've had a few bevvies."

"Ah don't worry about that," said Sal, sagely. "I've had two blackouts already this week."

'Shaky Sal' was not unique among the ladies in Garmisch who were noted for their over-indulgence, which at times even overshadowed the exploits of such luminaries as Sweat and Phenol. Kathy, was one of those who regularly burnt the candle at both ends and reveled in it. She was a well built, attractive and popular Yorkshire girl with a pleasant manner, but when under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol she could create quite a stir.

She worked for a short time as a chambermaid in a German hotel, and as a result of whatever cocktail of stimulants, found herself at 2am in a honeymoon couple's bedroom. The young German couple were safely snuggled up in bed when Kathy marched in, switched on the light and seated herself down on the bottom of the bed. Ignoring the man, she engaged the bemused German girl in a garbled conversation for half an hour until, as though coming out of a trance, she returned to something like normality, apologised, and staggered out back to her room. Apparently, the German girl thought the incident hilarious, while the young man seemed less than enthusiastic, which was somewhat

suprising, due to the fact that Kathy was stark naked!

The Annex was as ever a hideaway for many a poor dosser who, at a loose end and waiting for work, had much to thank any legal inhabitants of a room for refuge from the elements, especially during the cold Upper Bavarian winters. Scots Danny - he of the lost love - told the tale of his first trip to Garmisch: Not knowing anyone to share a room with, he plumped for sleeping under one of the stairwells that he had heard were in vogue with the more down and out of dossers. At the third attempt he found one that was unoccupied. The occupiers of the previous two he had tried "were," he declared, "like lions defending their territory." Eventually after finding a likely spot he settled down with his sleeping bag, until after about an hour into dreamland, along came the MP's at 2am to rouse them and move them along. Gathering up his sleeping bag he remembered hearing that if one was really stuck then the Annex toilets were the last resort. Swiftly, Danny took himself off to the nearest men's bog.

"I settled doon as far away from the urinals as possible," he said, "but I couldna settle, and somehow felt I wasnae alone." Sliding over to the only WC he prodded the door gingerly, it was locked.

"Finally," he said, "I plucked up the nerve and stuck ma heed under the gap at the bottom and looked up. And who should be there, sat on the seat, legs drawn up with his back against the wall and in a state of drunken oblivion, but Phenol."

It had long been a source of controversy among observers of the Garmisch sub-culture as to who earned the dubious title of chief drunk/dosser/waster, the three titles being very much synonymous with one another. I suppose Irish Ron would fill all three categories, along with Sweat and Phenol, as they were all completely devoid of ambition, either drinking or about to drink and were erratic workers. Phenol had in addition, his extreme parsimony to add to these doubtful traits. He would spend much of his time at the workers' canteen, buy a cheap beer and bury himself in a book, content to wile away the day there. As he once said in a philosophical justification of himself: "When people pay ye fer working, you feel obligated - ye canna relax and enjoy life." As lunchtime approached, people who he knew would meander in and eat their meals beside him, for in spite of his less savoury attributes he could be good company, and underneath the hazy facade, was an intelligent lad with a street-wise cunning; while his method of obtaining sustenance without recourse to paying for the privilege, was a supreme example of the dosser's art: While ostensibly engrossed in the book with one eye, he would take a slug from his bottle of beer and size up the meals of his neighbours with the other, occasionally puffing at a cheap, roll-up cigarette. As soon as he noticed one of his companions had left a little food on his plate, he would then start to display a little animation, fix the satiated owner with a pitiful eye and ask, "do ye want that?" Given the expected and hoped for reply, he would then proceed to launch into the

left-overs. I saw him do this many times over the years, which may account for the fact that I have never known him buy a meal. To Phenol, food was necessary only to provide the strength to move from bar to bar, to pay for the commodity was anathema to him, apart from taking away money that could be better spent on beer. Sweat would often chide him with, "yer toight fookin bastard," but nothing would ever get him to admit he was anything but a "little careful."

Ironically, Phenol then became poacher turned gamekeeper, in that he was later, a master of 10 bedsits in Glasgow bequeathed to him by his parents, and now has to administer the same rules to dossers that he once rebelled against. As in the case of two Canadian nurses who were being pestered by a fellow dosser. Phenol told Seamus, who was over on holiday, that the guy was an "alky", which coming from Phenol was no mean commendation. So, next morning Phenol and his brother went up to see the gentleman concerned, barged in the door and confronted the tenant. Phenol's curious, analogous use of American Wild West phrases then came to the fore, when he told him, "Saddle up partner, you're no longer welcome in Dodge". The dosser for some strange reason resisted being thrown out into a cold and wet Glasgow street at 7am and had to be 'assisted'.

"He was a pervert", said Phenol to Seamus. "I found a bunch of porno stuff in his drawer." This said in such a manner as to disabuse anyone that he had ever led a life but one of utmost propriety. I was glad that he had risen somewhat in the world since our Garmisch days and that he had been earning a bit of geld at last, but he would have probably still maintained that he was only breaking even. Eventually the flush of money being spent on alcohol became too much and Sheamus told me some years later, that he had ignored the doctors' warnings and had subsequently died. Although it was some years after our Garmisch days, he was still quite young.

Sweat was more of a free spirit, and little dependent on anyone or anything and subsequently paid little heed to authority, which endeared him to many people of a similar Bohemian/anarchic nature. Having arrived for the first time in Garmisch, and along with other sundry dossers he was sleeping in Sheamus's room at his hotel. It was a period when occasional purges would take place among the American hotels and civilian quarters in an attempt to flush out all the undesirables, and one of the Hausfrau's, who were the eyes and ears of the establishment and in charge of the hotel bedrooms, etc, discovered this nest of unsavoury characters dossing on the floor of Sheamus's room and immediately ran off to report to the manager. In the hiatus, everyone had girded their loins and fled the scene. All that is except Sweat who, despite being harangued by a frantic Sheamus, only turned over in his bag. Eventually he decided to emerge at the last moment, just too late to avoid the manager, who walked in just as he had reached an upright position. The manager looked contemptuously at Sweat, his nose wrinkling as he took in Sweat's three day growth, creased shirt, the stained and ragged jeans and the evil-smelling sleeping bag that coiled round his ankles.

"Und vot are you doing here mein Herr?" said the indignant manager.

"I'm fookin visitin if it's any of your business," retorted Sweat who, quite unperturbed by the whole situation, then turned his back on this petty official who had had the temerity to disturb his slumber. The manager was looking at Sweat in bewilderment and disbelief, his mouth opening and closing like a fish. Finally he muttered something about getting the MPs and left.

"It was then," said Sheamus, "that I realised Sweat was no ordinary dosser."

It is at this juncture that I should explain that anyone who is not American and caught on US premises, are subject to prosecution by the German authorities. And it was thus, that one day, three of these so-called 'dossers', and the only ones in Garmisch ever, to my knowledge, summoned to court on a charge of vagrancy or the German equivalent. These details were related to me by 'Fat-face' Mark and may have been embellished a little, but if only half of it was true it's still a cracker of a tale:

The three defendants were Mark, 'Scouse Sharon', and Barney. The court was in Partenkirchen and the Judge's first address to the defendants was to ask them their professions.

"Spüler," replied Fatface

"Und you," said the judge, directing his question to Sharon.

"Chambermaid," said Sharon

"Und you," he said to Barney.

"I'm a bagger," replied Barney.

"Und Vot is a bagger?" Asked the judge.

"Well", said Barney who, I think, had smoked a joint or two before entering the court. "At the American store I put groceries in bags for the customers. First the tins and the boxes then eggs or tomatoes. Then If they're men or burger-ass women I just let 'em pick the bags up, but if they're cute chicks I hand 'em the bags perhaps give 'em a pat on the ass and". Here, the judge, who had an excellent command of the English language, interrupted Barney's ramblings.

"Mr Walton. I do not vish to know the minutiae of your work. The bare facts are sufficient". Barney gave him a little forefinger of acknowledgement and shut up. There then ensued some 5 minutes of conversation with his assistants at either side before the judge gave his verdict. "You must all pay DM800 each."

Fatface and Sharon said nothing to this, but Barney exclaimed: "How am I gonna pay that?" The few people in the court went quiet as they waited for the Judge's reply.

"I do not know," he said. "May I suggest you put ze tins in first, zen ze boxes, zen ze eggs or tomatoes. You can even pat ze burger-asses, I do not give a scheisse." With that he stood up and dismissed the court.

I celebrated my Birthday in October by holding a party in my room at

the Blaue Traube. I thought it may last until the morning, it lasted for three days! My small room was permanently inhabited by Phenol, Sweat and a host of friends, dossers, waifs and strays. Funnily enough the only person who didn't make an appearance was my neighbour, Ron. I was sure that he was itching to get in but was under strict orders from Karen not to attend.

It is terribly difficult to relate what events took place over a three day period in which I never left the room except to go to the toilet and to fetch more beer from the bar below. The only thing I remember with clarity was when BJ set fire to Phenol's hair while impersonating a fire-eater, by means of an aerosol can and a cigarette lighter. One good thing about having such a three-day party was that a hangover never had time to set in, it was immediately obliterated by the next early morning session, which would start at noon until 3am the next day, although it has to be said that German beer, unlike the normal British variety, rarely left you with a headache.

It was only when the bacchanalia had finally subsided that I experienced any after-effects. There are not many times in one's life that you can actually feel your brain cells slowly atrophying, but that day was definitely one of them. I needed to get some fresh air and exercise, so took myself off to the mountains. It was wonderful to be up there ironing out the creases of cloying humanity from my mind, and while surveying the magnificent view of the town that nestled snugly below I thought of the recent history of the town, and how Garmisch had played no small part in the disposal of gold and currency in the biggest robbery in history, and how different the view of Garmisch would have been if at the end of the war a certain German Major had been ignored: Just before the end of the war, the rats on the sinking ship of the Third Reich were hopefully preparing for the fourth, by taking away from Berlin Reichsbank huge amounts of gold, silver, jewels, currency, bonds and art treasures that had been stolen from the conquered countries and their citizens. # On the 9th February 1945, the gold reserves and currency were transported to be buried for safekeeping in a potassium mine at Merkers in Thuringia, 200 miles south-west of Berlin. However, the 4th April saw General George Patton's troops break into the Thuringian plain, a belated effort to shift the gold failed and it fell into American hands. The entire hoard was estimated at \$315 million and worth at least fifteen times that amount now. But it was the gold and currency still in German hands and delivered into Mittenwald that lead up to the part that Garmisch played in the affair. Although all the details are convoluted in the extreme, it is sufficient, when detailing Garmisch's part in the whole affair, to say that on the 25/26th April, part of that stolen hoard, gold and currency estimated at \$15 million in 1945, was taken from Mittenwald and buried on a hillside between Mittenwald and Kochel and near a village called Einsiedl that overlooked the Walchensee and dominated by the 3,500 foot high Klausenkopf mountain, some twenty five kilometres from Garmisch.

On the 29th April the Americans swept through Oberammergau and Oberau and bore down on Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Ten thousand men lay wounded in the military hospitals and converted hotels. In the immediate area and at 5pm that day, a Colonel Pfeiffer who was in charge of the Nord-Alpen front, sent an order to Colonel Louis Hörl the commander of the Garmisch garrison, that Garmisch was to be defended at Farchant, the next village but one. However the Colonel and other officers had already decided to surrender Garmisch without a shot being fired. That morning, the 26 year old Major Pössinger, headed a surrender delegation to meet the American tanks of the 10th Armoured division advancing on Garmisch. He was just in time. The Americans had ordered a 200 bomber strike, with the object of reducing every town and military target between Oberammergau and Innsbruck to ashes. The American tank commander told Pössinger that it was too late to turn the bombers back, and that "in two hours they would be overhead." "But try," pleaded the Major, "it may not be impossible!" Eventually the Americans relented, and by radio and field telephone, the request was made for the bombers to turn back. The Major and a Lieutenant Licht were taken as hostages and tied to the turret of the leading tank, and at 6-45pm the tanks entered Garmisch and the saviour of Garmisch placed in the town hall cells.

Some days later in Mittenwald, Colonel Pfeiffer, who had been sentenced to death by Field Marshall Kesselring for failing to hold Garmisch - but the German resistance had collapsed before the sentence was carried out - was saying goodbye to his troops and sent them back to their homes. The Colonel however, was still custodian of part of the Reichsbank treasure and so elected to remain fugitive in the mountains. Pfeiffer and a Colonel Rauch, formerly of the Security Police in Berlin, would later move to Garmisch and regularly walk the 25kms to the Klausenkopf at night, returning with foreign currency stuffed in their pockets and rucksacks, to a house which lay on a steeply rising hill to the South-East edge of Partenkirchen: HAUS HOHE HALDE at 38 Gsteig Strasse. It was the family home of a famous German family, the Von Bluchers. Fieldmarshal Von Blucher had been a commander of the Prussian army, and had contributed to the British victory at Waterloo and the overthrow of Napoleon.#

I had cycled by the house many a time, little knowing until recently, the history of the illicit activities and the hoard that had entered through its portals many years before. Gazing down now at the beautiful houses spread below me, I mused on how many of the owners of these beautiful houses - many of them millionaires - and also many elderly, American ex-soldiers back in the States, owed their wealth to the Reichsbank fortune that was siphoned off at regular intervals, and which made Garmisch the Dodge City of all the towns under American occupation. I thought then that a statue to Major Pössinger should have been erected in Garmisch, and no doubt would have been, had he not been a Nazi in a post-war country that was intent on forgetting its evil history, but I guess there are quite a few wealthy persons and their children that owe the Major that debt.

With the onset of the winter season I was once more at the Hausberg, dishing out ski-boots with Bill, and wondering to myself how long I wanted to keep doing this. I was becoming envious watching others take off to Ko Samui, The Phillipines and other exotic places. Seamus had already started to travel with a new American girlfriend, and even Ron, who had not moved out of Garmisch for ten years was thinking of moving on to explore new lands. Mary had left a year ago, and as for Sweat, he had left some time ago and nobody knew where he went; although I had heard that he cared for his brother in Ireland who is mentally impaired, thus cannot handle finances and relied on Sweat completely. I have learnt subsequently though, that he also is dead, after falling into a river in Dublin, so yet another old friend has gone prematurely.

Hughie reported this tale of his return to Garmisch after an absence of 10 years, where he told all and sundry that he was never going to work again the rest of his life. Apparently some callow, Irish youth knowing nothing of Sweat, took umbrage at this declaration and chastised him for 'sponging' off the Government. Sweat then decided to impart a nugget of his home-spun logic to the stripling:

"Au contraire," he said. "I'm actually saving the Government money."

"How so?" demanded the youth.

"Well, yer see," said Sweat, "If dey say I have to work or stop mi dole, den I'd have to do it; but it'd drive me mad and I'd end up killing somebody, den dey'd have to put me in prison for years, which would cost em about £20,000 a year to keep me. So, in actual fact I'm saving the Government money".

Hughie said that the youth looked hard at Sweat for a long time before silently getting up and leaving. We could have told the youth that asking that question would have resulted in nothing else but game set and match to Sweat.

It was March 86, and the final days of the old Hausberg ski lodge were nigh. The powers that be had finally agreed to the building of a new lodge at a cost of some \$2 million, and I had decided to quit Garmisch once again. Itchy feet together with the fact that the summer bike rental service was going to be scrapped, made my mind up. I somehow didn't fancy the golf course again. The bulldozing of the Hausberg was set for May, and all but the bare bones of the equipment was being placed in the warehouse for storage, people were being laid off and a general air of finality hung over the place. I knew I would not be here to see the old place demolished or the new one constructed and was resigning myself to no more of those incidents that brightened up one's day when, in a final act of AFRC lunacy, two German electricians marched in Bob's office with a work order. The order stated that cables were to be installed ready for the computers. I heard Bob from many yards away. "Computers, what goddam computers? We aint got no computers." Then a pause, followed by a rising voice. "They're gonna knock the goddam place down in May, what's the use in

putting in goddam cables for Chrissakes?" All to no avail, a start on the job request was made. Whether it was completed, I don't know.

Some years later, in March 88, after a years training in massage therapy in England I went to Thailand, met up with some Garmischers, then flew onto Bali; Australia; New Zealand and finally the USA via Hawaii to visit Seamus and a few more people I knew, then going back to England, eventually arriving back in Garmisch in the Spring of 1990. It was not like previous returns. Now a spirit of imminent demise hung over AFRC as the 'Iron Curtain' had been removed. Bases were being closed amid talk of further 'RIFS' - reduction in forces. Even 'lififers', people who looked set to pick up their pensions in Garmisch, were talking of leaving. The new Hausberg ski lodge was immaculate, but bore the same soulless analogy between the 'Nags' and the 'Talk of the Town' pubs back in Calella. It was especially sad for me who had been there many years ago and seen the changes, to see the heart of the Anglo-American community finally disintegrating, for at its peak AFRC and its off-shoot, AAFES, must have employed some 1000 people, and discounting local Germans, only one third of those would have been over thirty. I sadly left for the last time in October of that year.

In the intervening years, I have looked back at those days with an unashamed and nostalgic yearning. We live in a world now where money is the *raison d'etre*, and politics influenced by media moguls, where giant conglomerates wreak their corporate banditry, and as the companies get bigger the world becomes smaller. I am glad that I travelled at a time when it was pretty safe to stick out a thumb, and find it paradoxical that I can look back on the Thatcher years with fondness: mainly because I wasn't in Great Britain for any length, at that time. The ethos that both spawned and fed off Thatcherism also has a paradox, and one that is increasing, in that more people, baffled and bewildered at where technology is leading them and redundant in their 40s due to 'downsizing', are reverting to 'downshifting' and simply giving up. Reverting to the nomad. Independent free spirits are now attacking mountains, living in camper vans in the deserts, joining new-age communes 'intentional communities'.

It used to be said by Garmischers when they returned from back home, that people in Garmisch do not seem to have aged as much as their contemporaries in Britain. This Shangri-la theory is not as fanciful as it first appears. there was little pressure on anyone, and the prevalence of youth - you were an old-timer at thirty - combined with mountain air, exercise and being preserved by the alcohol, all helped to keep stress lines at bay. But as I have related, the eventual demise of friends due to alcohol were a stark warning of too much over-indulgence and having revised this book from its original writing in 2000, have had to sadly make changes to that effect.

Garmisch AFRC & AAFES was a unique organisation set in a place and a time that will probably never be repeated, although slimmed-down

versions still survive. It was an environment born out of a war and perpetuated by a perceived threat to peace, but that strong American presence, along with their allies in Europe, was the reason such places like Garmisch and the rest of Europe were allowed to flourish. Its existence caused me to meet some weird, wonderful and crazy characters, gave me friends that I still keep in touch with, some I would love to hear from again and some I wouldn't want to see again, even in my worst nightmares. As I have already related, my old mates, Ron, Phenol and Sweat have since died-of drink-related illness which I suppose tells a tale of the times and environment in Garmisch more starkly than anything else could. There was supposedly a reunion for all ex-Garmischers on the new year prior to the new millenium. Like the planned annual conventions for spulers, it never really came off. Perhaps it *is* true that one should never return, I haven't yet, but anyway, it *was* fun.

"I wish I wish I wish in vain that we
could sit simply in that room again.
Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat
I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like
that."*

The End

Thanks to Sheamus and other contributors, and to Ian Sayer for his permission to allow me to print extracts from his and Douglas Botting's splendidly, researched book, 'Nazi Gold'.

* 'Bob Dylan's Dream'- 'Freewheeling' Bob Dylan.

Extracts from 'Nazi Gold'- Ian Sayer & Douglas Botting with the Sunday Times. Panther Books. Granada Pub Ltd. 1984.